



UWI IGDS

CRGS

CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES

A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

GENDER, BIOPOLITICS AND CARIBBEAN FEMINISMS



ISSUE 2
SEPTEMBER 2008

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<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>



Gender, Biopolitics and Caribbean Feminisms

Issue 2, September 2008

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The University of
the West Indies
Centre for Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

Gender, Biopolitics and Caribbean Feminisms: Blending Flesh with Beloved Clay

Abstract

The sub-title for this issue, “Blending Flesh with Beloved Clay”, comes from Dominican writer and politician Phyllis Allfrey’s poem, “Love for An Island”.ⁱ The poem speaks to the essays, creative works and reflections contributed here by scholars, artists, poets, students and activists. Its ironic voice critiques romantic and nationalist visions of the Caribbean and its history, but empathy nonetheless quietly emerges from within its scathing lines. The lingering image is one of people’s attempts to define their relationship to a space and, at times, to define the space itself. While in Allfrey’s verse, nationalists’ “legendary politics decay” and ultimate belonging only comes with death, the piece opens questions about the other ways that more ordinary women and men establish their relationship to their homes. Beyond the ways that they seek identities, attachments and symbols of power, it positions the impact of the Caribbean landscape on bodies, lives and desires.

Introduction

Using approaches ranging from visual analysis and literary critique to ethnography and in-depth interviews, the essays in this issue interrogate how gender shapes women's and men's relationships with various manifestations of Caribbean history, schooling, geography, art, music, dance, migration and organisational politics. Complementing them, the poems, personal reflection, public lecture and essay under the section "Gender Dialogues" introduce readers to the diverse ways that individuals are conceptualising womanhood, manhood and feminist politics for themselves. Similar themes weave through the interview and tribute under "The Making of Caribbean Feminisms", and the special collection profile in the section on "Research in Action". These diverse writings reflect a fluidity in the ways that we live, negotiate and think about gender, and they all offer different perspectives on Caribbean feminism.

The connections across sections are important for continuing Caribbean feminists' challenge to the ways that scholarship, activism, institution-building, personal reflection and life histories have often been cast as disconnected forms of knowledge production. Consistent with the aims of the journal, this issue comprises conventional, blind peer-reviewed, academic essays as well as a range of discourses and devices of the written, oral and visual. These latter speak more directly to how gender is lived among real people and how Caribbean gender studies and activism are constantly being forged, not as separate entities, but in tandem and conversation with each other. The *CRGS* sets rigorous editorial standards while encouraging theorising that is open to forms and languages beyond the academic. As a woman, poet and politician, Allfrey also drew her understanding from flesh, script, clay, action and imagination.

The photo-essays, especially, invite readers along this path. Like the book review, they make women and their realities more visible and affirm their public significance. While both women and men are equally gendered, and the study of masculinity is an area of growing importance, this feminist commitment to women's stories continues to define the space offered by the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*. The videos, in their unique way, bring another perspective to the interrelated ways that ideologies, institutions, bodies, feminisms, and women's and men's experiences take on nuanced meanings.

The contributions in this issue read gender through insights into Caribbean realities and come to terms with the Caribbean through an exploration of how notions of womanhood and manhood have been and continue to be lived. While they centre the region, they also offer significant insights for scholars of colonial history, women's writing, performance, education, masculinity and social movements. These are common themes across different contexts. In this way, the journal joins global conversations, offering a source for comparative work or theoretical insights that go beyond area studies.

Given its history of slavery, indentureship and migration, the Caribbean has always been a place where bodies matter. As a mirror to this, sexual politics and the ways they have been negotiated have always influenced conceptions of the Caribbean itself. How women and men negotiate bodily identity is not so different from the ways they engage public power. As the articles show, the ways that artists mark ethnic difference among colonized

women or the ways that boys define their identities amidst US-dominated globalisation are not separate from beliefs about what values should shape “respectability” or from the ways that poverty is negotiated using transactional sex.

Used here as a metaphor, Allfrey’s whole phrase, “beloved clay”, highlights the extent to which coming to terms with who one is, as a Chutney dancer, Jamaican returnee or Haitian community activist, also involves investing meaning in the surrounding context, whether this is a diasporic understanding of dance forms, a particular part of the Jamaican landscape or a local discourse about NGOs and aid. Similarly, the investments made by Elsa Leo-Rhynie, Clotil Walcott and other women to whom we are indebted were not just about changing gendered realities or women’s rights, but were also engagements redefining the signposts of Caribbean educational, occupational and family life. Even without the “sternest passion” of politicians, as myths, images, relationships, identities, culture and lives are built, so too are distinctly Caribbean landscapes, experiences and discourses of power. Simply put, this is one way that biopolitics works.

Biopolitics

Biopolitics refers to the ways that power is wielded through the production and regulation of bodies and sexualities. This Foucauldian concept interprets how states and other sovereign powers discipline individuals and populations using techniques of surveillance and governance that impose norms of human conduct, myths of contamination and impurity, and stereotypes about different groups’ distinct physical and psychological features on (subjugated) women and men. Generally, the literature on biopolitics looks at the collection of census data, control of sewage systems, illness and health, sexuality, cultural “traditions”, colonial policies, notions of respectability and shame, and other forms of social/biological control.

Biopolitics legitimises the centrality of the body in understanding the maintenance of hierarchical social orders, gendered discourses of self-control, and the range of ways that women and men negotiate identity, belonging, citizenship, culture, rights and authority. After comparing the essays, videos, poems and reflections, it occurred to me that this concept provided a framework for linking these seemingly disparate contributions.

As this is a general issue open to a variety of foci, other pieces shed a more focused light on Caribbean feminisms, placing them in historical and contemporary context. They remind us of the link between the study of gender and a commitment to action in feminist praxis. Together, the issue’s contents draw on enduring concerns, established lenses and emerging debates, signalling many ways that ideas are brought to life.

Flesh

Jaime Lee Loy’s video, *Unease*, the front cover of this issue, highlights the contradictory messages regarding motherhood, beauty and marriage that young women continue to confront. These messages stick to the skin, choke like a noose, trap like a glass cage and create a cacophony of questions and answers that end up as noise. Lee Loy created this two-minute adaptation specifically for the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*. As the issue’s front cover, it establishes both the embodied and performative aspects of gender,

as well as the dilemmas of challenging the social order. The link for *Unease* appears again under “Video Essays” and allows it to be viewed in full-screen format.

Amar Wahab brings visual representations to the fore, reading painted imagery, sketches, photographs and lithographs to examine how East Indian women were exoticized and disciplined as specific kinds of labourers and cultural others within colonial, Creole social hierarchy. His visual analysis throws light on the colonial marriage compact that idealised them as dependent housewives and child bearers under the patriarchal control of Indian men, and the ways that they were set apart from African, Coloured and White women. This had an overall effect of reinforcing indentured women’s double marginalization as a feminised underclass of labourers, justifying the civilising mission claimed by colonial powers, and inventing a specifically Caribbean Orientalist discourse.

Sara Bergman’s work shows the value of having lived and worked in Trinidad for over a year, bringing bodily knowledge to the fore through her participation in dance. Her research uses performance to investigate and interpret how Indian women in Trinidad negotiate conceptions of modern and traditional Indian femininity. She examines how classical forms, Bollywood influences and locally grown styles associated with Chutney music physically enable both reproduction of and resistance to cultural values. Her essay illuminates the specific meanings that dance has taken on in Trinidad, its association with femininity and, perhaps because of this, the personal and political successes it has enabled women to claim in the public sphere.

Heather Horst’s ethnographic picture of Mandeville highlights the significance of notions of respectability to Jamaican returnees’ identities, and in this sense takes a different approach to a colonial discourse also interrogated by Wahab and Bergman. Horst shows how gendered experiences of migration, and the cultivation of family life, homes and landscapes create shifting juxtapositions between respectability and reputation, blackness and whiteness, being English and being Jamaican. For Jamaican women returning home after decades in England, getting their colour back in the sun is a rejection of symbols of respectability associated with Whiteness. Even as they reject these meanings, however, other symbols associated with house, land and area of residence impose a tyranny of respectability much harder to ignore.

Returning to Trinidad and Tobago, Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar argues that childhood sexual abuse is one troubling basis for transactional sexual practices, violence, crime, addictive behaviours and rates of HIV infection in a Caribbean region long marked by the sexualization and commodification of bodies. In contrast to previous articles’ emphases on images, dance and domesticity, Hernandez-Ramdwar uses soca music to show how young women and men invest in “rank”, “reputation” and social status derived from being sexually and street savvy. Exploring the lyrics of Trinidadian performer Bunji Garlin, she highlights how music can both expose young people’s realities and offer cathartic release. However, it can also celebrate a materialistic bling culture, teach violence and glorify death, and perpetuate problematic sexual scripts that add to the physical risks young people face.

Further exploring the pull of discourses of “reputation”, David Plummer, Arden McLean and Joel Simpson situate homophobia at the centre of boys’ views and experiences of schooling. They argue that education no longer offers opportunities for establishing a heterosexual masculine identity. Instead, boys have turned to hard physicality, the outdoors and sexual prowess. Peer culture especially ensures conformity to elaborate codes and styles that encourage boys to resist adult authority and to earn status by taking risks. In this light, schooling loses status. Ultimately, gender, sexuality, adolescent discourses of masculine reputation and peer group dynamics result in boys being more likely to engage in violence and crime, become less prepared for the labour market and higher education, and be more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Relying on a literary lens, Michael Niblett uses Jamaican author Erna Brodber’s 1980 novel, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, to dissect the uneven and precocious way that modernity is articulated in the region. His essay shows the parallel between narrative modes that include African oral traditions and defy the bounds of European convention, and the social significance of the female, vulgar and reputable, body in the larger body politic. Brodber’s emphasis on the female body as integral to reconfiguring self and society enables her to incorporate the “communal body” of popular knowledge and experience into the novel’s form and narrative. In Niblett’s view, it therefore offers opportunities for rearticulating gender, ethnicity and modernity in Caribbean literature and life.

In the final essay in this section, Mark Schuller compares the ways that two Haitian women’s NGOs relate both to GAD approaches and to the aid recipients and clients they serve. One organisation operates democratically, creating horizontal, egalitarian, agenda-setting practices while the other “imports” leaders into a hierarchical and alienating structure that heightens local inequalities. Schuller’s ethnographic research suggests that funding for activities to combat HIV/AIDS can easily displace a more holistic and empowering emphasis on women’s collective mobilisation. Additionally, the clientelism that characterises donors’ approaches in Haiti can fail to meaningfully involve communities in combating economic hardship and HIV/AIDS, and ends up wasting the scarce resource that women greatly need.

Under the link, “Gender Dialogues”, Kavita Vidya Ganness’ poems “Tigress” and “Water Sister” again turn our gaze to the body and emotions as a basis for conceptualising identity, community and belonging. Ganness writes of her own stealth and incremental steps to freedom, calling on all women to flex their power and walk unafraid. Identify with her, she says, “A Tigress Lives Inside Me”. Her second piece takes aspects of corporality associated with abjection and release, such as tears, ashes and blood, and makes them the basis for the highest kind of communion among women. Both her poems claim a feminine essence emerging from shared experiences of the female body.

From his own perspective as a young man, Anan Smith reflects on how his politics changed after taking a course offered by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, St. Augustine. Narrating his discussions with male peers about pornography and his own

negotiations with naturalised symbols of male privilege, Smith's quiet rethinking of masculinity provides a glance at how young men may be defining their own gender consciousness and (pro-) feminist politics amidst the masculinism of everyday life. His words provide honest, challenging reading for those facilitating discussions about men and masculinities, and represent one of the few writings by young men about manhood in the region

Roots

The following writings focus less on issues of biopolitics than the earlier essays, and take readers into a panoramic look at Caribbean feminism. Patricia Mohammed's public lecture, given in Dominica earlier this year, suggests that we open the aperture through which we view feminism and gender in the region. The questions of the past are different from those of the future and yet, ultimately, basic human desires for love, respect, dignity of labour, family survival and leisure remain much the same. Mohammed draws on the complex and inspiring history of women's writings, and struggles and solidarities across the sexes, to show us that change in its myriad forms has always been possible. For her, women's experiences and rights as productive workers, including domestic workers, and men's experiences and paternity rights as they take on more work in the home are challenges we need to face with continued optimism.

Beverly Shirley's challenge to Caribbean feminisms marks the extent to which the movement has come of age. The paths cut by women building NGOs, UN and state machineries and academic centres are now propelling a contemporary generation of feminist scholars to assess the gains made and to chart future directions. Noting the successes of almost a century of Jamaican women's organising and feminist activism, Shirley nonetheless asks about the extent to which working class women's lives have changed. She compels us to look "from below" at the personal politics among women and in feminist organisations, and to honestly pursue the egalitarianism feminists say we aim to achieve.

Under the sub-theme, "The Making of Caribbean Feminisms", June Ann Castello's interview with Elsa Leo-Rhynie, past Principal of the University of the West Indies, Mona, is valuable reading for feminist academics and activists looking critically and constructively at the institutionalisation of Gender Studies in the Anglophone region. In the interview, Leo-Rhynie reflects on academic feminism, the relationship between academia and grassroots activism, the impact of "male marginalization" discourses, the transition to another generation of feminists both inside and outside the academy, and her own sense of priorities for the immediate future.

Rhoda Reddock's eulogy of labour activist and mother Clotil Walcott complements the interview by bringing into focus another tier of feminist history. In 1974, Clotil Walcott founded and led the National Union of Domestic Employees. This was one more important step in her tireless struggle for the rights of women workers and domestic workers, and for recognition of women's unwaged domestic labour. Reddock conveys the extraordinary example that Clotil set and her successes along the way. Her story inspires,

but also cautions. The struggle for significant improvements in working-class women's lives must continue.

Under the "Research in Action" link, the *CRGS* features Carmen Hutchinson Miller's profile of the Nita Barrow Specialist Collection at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, Cave Hill, Barbados. Thus far, the collection houses archive materials from the lives of Dame Eugenia Charles, Prime Minister of Dominica from 1980–1995, and Dame Nita Barrow, Governor General of Barbados from 1990–1995. Hutchinson Miller's review highlights the CGDS' ongoing Caribbean Women Catalysts for Change (CWCC) project. Its objective is to document outstanding examples of women's leadership in the Caribbean in areas ranging from political participation and trade unionism to education and agriculture.

In two of the journal's final sections, we maximise the technologies now available for online publishing. We are pleased to feature Gabrielle Le Roux's exhibition of portraits of Dominican centenarians. Her photo-essay, "Living Ancestors", documents the process of creating these images and the lessons to be learned from these ordinary, yet amazing, women. While her exhibit continues to travel around the world, Ma Pampo has since passed away. Le Roux's paintings indeed mark a precious moment in her life, showing that even when living flesh returns to sacred clay, legacies live on. Le Roux's exhibit is currently being shown at the NiNsee Institute on Slavery in Amsterdam.

Closer to home, Jaime Lee Loy's photo-essay, consisting of clips from her exhibit "War in the Home", domesticates flowers while using forks, knives and plates as tools to express danger, violence and pain. She unsettles romanticised notions of the home, love and relationships and correlates everyday implements defining women's lives with unwanted things such as roaches and slow, but steady, decay. Both photo-essays continue a rich tradition of feminist art that visualises women as subjects of their own lives and that gives form to the intimate ways women experience and resist negation. They enable us to upload representations of womanhood from the Caribbean to wherever people are in the online world.

My own video essay introduces a new link for the *CRGS* and I hope this will be the first of many issues featuring videos accompanied by critical and accessible narratives. *Speak Out* uses music, photos, text and interviews to document feminist activism among first-year students in an Introduction to Women's Studies course at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. Going behind the scenes presented, the essay also reflects on the challenges of teaching Women's Studies and confronting masculinism, and considerations that arose when editing and screening the video. It provides questions and suggestions that facilitators in gender consciousness-raising and feminist movement-building workshops can use to stimulate discussion, debate and feminist action.

In the journal's final section, Diana Thorburn reviews Jamaican Rosie Stone's book, *No Stone Unturned*, and charts the stories, emotions, fears, hurts and courageous struggle for survival that defined Rosie's life after being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

Together these contributions by well-known and emerging writers and artists present a panoramic view spanning Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Dominica, Jamaica and Haiti. Future issues of the journal aim to expand beyond these to include the French and Spanish Caribbean, and the Caribbean diaspora. The final section of note is one for our readers. Using the possibilities offered by technology, the CRGS now has a link, titled “Critical Engagements”, where readers can leave comments and questions and engage with those posts made by others.

More than Words

Though fledgling, the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* continues to hold fast to internationally observed standards for journal publication. All the essays in this issue were blind reviewed by two reviewers who deserve much thanks for their invaluable assistance, and for being part of the widely dispersed community of academics brought together by this journal. The future will bring both Special Issues, which call for papers on specific themes, and general issues, such as this one, which throw out a wide net and pull to shore unexpected foci, writings, images and theoretical conundrums. No doubt, our reviewers near and far will continue to hear from us regularly as each issue draws on their support.

Where needed, the CRGS Editorial Board and Advisory Board also offered sage advice on questions related to the look, form and rules, those standards that make up the journal’s head cornerstone. Finally, I thank the contributors for sharing their thought-provoking work and for their patient support of this issue despite its delays. Future issues will hopefully widen the networks of both the Centre and the journal, and bring in new voices from within and beyond the region.

Closer to home, there are greater thanks to give. Professor Patricia Mohammed, in her role as Executive Editor, provided continual guidance and feedback as I encountered challenges and opportunities for learning at every step. The issue benefited from many of her emails sent at two o’clock in the morning, an hour when it seems only mothers are awake, offering soothing words. June Ann Castello, my counterpart at CGDS in Mona, Jamaica, made crucial contributions at different stages. As Assistant Guest Editor, she collaborated with me to choose the essays that define this issue. Although these were brief steps together for us, they continue a tradition of cooperation and support among the three units of the CGDS at the University of the West Indies. Based in Trinidad and Tobago, Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw also offered valuable support as Book Review Editor.

From our staff at the CRGS, Jewel Fraser deserves special recognition for her unrelenting Copy-Editor’s eye. Jewel’s timely and thorough reading of the contributions to the journal created its polished feel and both Donna Drayton, the Editorial Assistant, and I were frequently more than grateful for her reliable professionalism. Daren Dhoray was our much-needed IT expert on campus here at UWI, St. Augustine, and if all the journal’s links work as you read this issue, Daren is the one that we thank for it. Finally, Donna Drayton, in her role as Editorial Assistant, competently, calmly and generously followed (and followed up on) every step. It is with great sincerity that I thank Donna for the

myriad ways that she continues to manage and improve this space for Caribbean scholarship. A commitment to supporting and furthering the body of work on gender, women, men, feminism and social change, as it emerges in established and experimental forms is, for both of us, a passion also for centering the Caribbean at home and in the world.

This issue goes global at the same time as the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, celebrates its 15th anniversary. The *CRGS* is a testament to new paths for its institutional home as well as for academic feminism and gender theorising. Hopefully, this issue maps a small piece of the excitingly vast and “beloved” terrain, of both clay and flesh, that remains to be charted.

Gabrielle Jamela Hosein
Guest Editor

ⁱ Allfrey, Phyllis. 1990. "Love for An Island" in *Creation Fire: A CAFRA Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry*, edited by Ramabai Espinet. Toronto, Ontario: Sister Vision and Tunapuna, Trinidad: CAFRA, 226.



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Race, Gender, and Visuality: Regulating Indian Women Subjects in the Colonial Caribbean

Amar Wahab

Abstract

As scholars in Caribbean Studies struggle to deconstruct the complicated cultural history of colonialism, visual representations — such as painted imagery, sketches, photographs and lithographs, often accompanied by “word imagery”ⁱ (i.e. elaborate word descriptions that are meant to stand in for the image) — are increasingly recognised as valid and unique sites that challenge the story of Western modernity in its ontological relationship to the Caribbean. Recent works by Patricia Mohammed, Krista Thompson, Mimi Sheller, and Beth Fowkes-Tobinⁱⁱ have illuminated the construction of colonial regimes of visibility that aimed to discursively construct, position, and regulate colonized subjects and to produce a seemingly coherent, intimate and consensual code of social relationsⁱⁱⁱ. They have also thought about the multiple gestures of resistance, accommodation, assimilation, mimicry, ambivalence and transculturation that trouble the visual contract between colonial subjects and their landscapes, producing counter histories that complicate the ways in which contemporary post-colonial subjects are imagined. Aside from Mohammed’s recent work, very few studies in this emergent strand of Caribbean cultural studies address the issue of gender and its intersection with other sites of constructed difference such as race, ethnicity and sexuality. In addition, visual studies on

the colonial Caribbean, remaining very much an Afro-centric discourse, are yet to take seriously the iconography of East Indians in the region as a relational and constitutive category of consciousness as it glimpses into and questions the historical construction of identity, social structure and power relations.

Introduction

In this paper I would like to continue to address both these gaps by looking at how East Indian women were visualised in Caribbean colonial discourse in ways that discursively constructed, positioned and regulated them within a colonial Creole social hierarchy.^{iv} Like anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, I see the colonial archives (in this case, the visual) as part and parcel of colonial “disciplinary regimes that have produced subjugated bodies and the sorts of identities created by them” as “strategies of rule”.^v Looking at paintings, sketches, postcard photographs, and word paintings in colonial travelogues and catalogues, the main thesis of this paper is that East Indian^{vi} women in the colonial Caribbean were discursively produced and managed on the registers of labour and culture: as a specific category of labour with differential implications for social mobility and freedom, and as a distinct cultural other within the matrix of colonial social relations. Moreover, these visual registers allow us to contemplate “the relationship between visible characteristics and invisible properties, outer form and inner essence”^{vii} that rationalised the optic governance of Indian women in the West. As racialized/ethnicized and gendered subjects, East Indian women were visualised in distinct ways in relation to colonial men and other categories of colonial women that ensured their double marginalization. Images that focus specifically on Indian women or set them at the peripheries of the composition can be regarded as tenuous visual contracts between Indian women as depicted objects (objectified) and the colonial gaze that strategically depicted and forcefully legitimated these representations. As a result, the primary visual regime of representation that allows us to view the Indian woman subject in the colonial Caribbean also reflects the regulation and discipline of Indian women in line with colonial rule and rationality. Nowhere in the colonial archives has the author found evidence of Indian women attempting to re-vision and re-cast themselves in the visual catalogues of the nineteenth century. It is only by reading the second glances and slippages of the colonial eye with or against the grain of historical context that we might illumine an-other radar of consciousness and self-determination on the part of Indian women. This paper, therefore, admits to retelling part of the story from the perspective of the colonizing gaze, while at the same time challenging the seeming coherence and claims to the all-encompassing power of this hegemonic gaze. It first sketches the socio-historical context which positioned East Indians in the colonial Caribbean and then focuses on how colonial travelogues and catalogues represented and naturalised Indian women as labouring and cultural subjects.

Historical context: Positioning Indians in the colonial Caribbean

According to anthropologist Viranjini Munasinghe,^{viii} the “material and ideological coordinates” for positioning East Indians in places like Trinidad, British Guiana and Jamaica emerged from the existing colonial context even before they began arriving. The immediate post-emancipation (post-1838) period in the Anglophone Caribbean was characterised by a decline in the economic prosperity of plantations, exacerbated by concerns about labour shortage in what was generally referred to as the “West Indian labour question”.^{ix} The period was marked by a transition to wage labour, efforts to curtail African ex-slaves’ self-reliance and symbolic ascendancy, fears about the rise of an Afro-peasantry separate from the plantation, increasing pressures from the planter class to secure inexpensive and immobile sources of labour, fluctuating incomes from the

sugar industry, and planter advocacy for the importation of substitute labour from China, Europe and India. British colonials and planters regarded this overturning of the established order symbolically as a “return to barbarism” as African ex-slaves withdrew from the plantation and set up peasant and urban communities.^x This marked an inversion of planter-labour relations whereby planters were now in a situation of industrial dependence on waged ex-slaves.^{xi} According to historian Verene Shepherd, planters in Jamaica resorted rather unsuccessfully to coercive tactics and unacceptable labour terms such as anti-settler laws, lower wages, destruction of ex-slaves’ property, and prevention of ex-slaves’ land purchases to keep African ex-slaves bound to the plantation.^{xii} This manoeuvre was however coded in British administrative and planter colonial discourses as the fall of the Negro from the labouring grace of the plantation. Africanist discourses double registered black urban communities as signs of urban degeneration, peasant communities as squatting, and above all, any off-plantation activity as idleness and non-entitlement to colonial citizenship. This regime of representation served to bolster the new scheme of labour substitution in which, after an initial period of experimentation in Mauritius, East Indian indentured labourers were first brought to British Guiana (1938), Trinidad and Jamaica (1845) and later to eleven other Caribbean colonies (British, French and Dutch) between 1838 and 1917.^{xiii} While British colonial discourse asserted that emancipation from the plantation resulted in the “negro’s” retrogression into depravity, it simultaneously claimed that the incoming “coolie”^{xiv} or East Indian immigrant labour force was necessary for stabilising the sugar industry and restoring British hegemony.

Indentured “coolies” were therefore symbolically cast as saviours of the plantation in colonial discourse, as they not only signalled a return to labour, but also a return to a mode of rationality that restored white *and* Creole planters and merchants as the rightful owners of capitalist enterprise and modernity in the region. This restoration depended on the strict regulation, through indenture contracts and legal arrangements, of indentured Indian labourers within the confines of a cheap, docile, immobile and controllable quasi-proletariat that would not threaten or dare to revolutionise their relation with capital.^{xv} In this new labour regime, indentured Indian women were gauged as problematic as they were initially viewed by planters as economic liabilities; on the Victorian yardstick of industry Indian women were assumed to possess an inferior capacity for plantation labour. This resulted in their being assigned to what the planters considered as “easier” tasks that “reasonably” deserved lower wages.^{xvi}

This hierarchy of plantation work was not only disadvantageous to Indian women in terms of their earnings, but also structurally positioned them as subordinates to Indian men with whom they worked side by side, and with equal effort. In the initial phase of indentureship, women’s reproductive capacity was also seen as a liability as planters imagined that reproduction and child rearing would extract women from the workforce, and coerce planters to incur maintenance costs for what they regarded as idle labour. As we shall see later in this article, it was, however, Indian women’s sexuality about which planters and colonial officials were mostly concerned, as it was an important rationalising strand in the stabilisation of the predominantly Indian male workforce as the crucial vertebra of the plantation-capitalistic enterprise. Disciplining Indian women’s sexuality

was more about securing a sexual contract between Indian women and multiple patriarchies in the name of both Victorian morality and economic rationality.

In addition to these disciplinary gestures that re-rationalised the relation between labour and capital, post-emancipation colonies, especially Trinidad and Jamaica, were in the midst of a cultural crisis due to the increasing contestation from the free coloured middle-class for self-determination and cultural dominance. Within this early emergence of what some have identified as the articulation of nationalist sentiment,^{xvii} colonial subjects were imagined and evaluated in relation to Creole^{xviii} culture that was in itself quite complex and multiply-configured, combining cultural characteristics of European and African cultures as the extremities of a scale of indigeneity. All Creole subjects were considered to be inside the *imaginative* boundaries of the colony, but were ranked against each other according to their approximation to the European end of the continuum of mixture. In colonies such as Trinidad and Jamaica with an unusually large free coloured middle class, the power of this group to determine the terms of inclusion implied a strict and selective process of admission and access to indigeneity.^{xix}

If black ex-slaves occupied the lowest position in the Creole social hierarchy, East Indians or “Coolies” were placed totally outside this structure as they did not embody a mixture, biologically or culturally, of either of the primary Afro and Euro ingredients of Creole culture. In fact, East Indians were cast as cultural aliens who were saturated with an ancestral culture that was not of the New World.^{xx} This cultural and ontological separation was further structured and naturalised by spatial and occupational segregation of “coolies” from the rest of Creole society. According to Munasinghe, the second half of the nineteenth century entailed a legal and spatial differentiation of East Indians through occupational segregation as settled workers near to the plantation while segments of the black population “gravitated to what they perceived as higher-status occupations.”^{xxi} In this period of differential freedoms, Creole and Indian cultures maintained predominantly exclusive relations within the confines of plantation society, although Indian indentureship was deemed necessary for the partial recuperation of the plantation in the midst of a growing economic crisis in the global sugar industry. Historian Brigid Brereton claims that although the Trinidadian Indian population had increased to one-third of the island by the 1920s, East Indians were still kept separate from the other social tiers by language, culture, religion, and ethnicity.^{xxii} More significantly, contrary to the ways in which East Indians were treated as a homogeneous alien social category (the fourth tier at the bottom of society), Brereton states that socioeconomic differentiation had begun within the Indian community in the late nineteenth century^{xxiii}. This differentiation also occurred on the basis of gender relations, in which Indian women were not only viewed as cultural aliens as a result of Anglo-orientalist positionings but especially as subjects who were simultaneously outside of Creole notions of respectability — as women who did not nor could truly ever meet, and who therefore threatened, the standards of colonial womanhood.

Masking alienation: Indentured women as feminised underclass

The category “coolie” was used in the nineteenth century to denote labourers, especially from Asia, who were contracted both coercively and voluntarily for work in the New

World. The term is historically racialized and troubles the division between slave and migrant labour. Moreover in colonial discourse, the “coolie” was a constructed category of labour and culture allotted a very calculated degree of freedom and limited authenticity in the social hierarchies of colonial societies. According to literary critic Lisa Lowe, it is important to demarcate this category of labour as one in “a range of intermediate forms of coercive labour”.^{xxiv} If we are to take seriously the claims of Lowe and Moon-Ho Jung^{xxv} about indentured labour as a specific category of restricted freedom, how might we extend and further nuance this argument in relation to the differential placement of “coolie” female productive labour within the context of West Indian indentureship? Perhaps in the colonial visual catalogue we might glimpse this intricate construction of the labour contract with its unique implications for the conditional freedom of East Indian women and the casting of these women “in the epic story of world-historic capital”.^{xxvi}

East Indian women were initially positioned on the Caribbean landscape, first and foremost as labouring subjects, symbolically restoring order and stability to plantation society. Yet the images of women predominantly in plantation spaces indicate her spatial confinement and limitation to a particular set of social relations. These images suggest that as labourers, Indian women worked exclusively with Indian men, with very limited mobility as bound labourers, and with little access to extra-plantation (especially urban) relations with Afro-Creole men and women. In addition, Indian women are depicted working alongside Indian men, as if they were equal in the ranks of this captive indentured quasi-proletariat. Visually, gendered differences of labour were carefully masked in sketches such as *Coolies A-field* in which both the male and female Indian figures are depicted working alongside each other, without much hint of how they might be positioned vis-à-vis each other on the wage scale. Are these visual mementos indicative of the levelling of East Indian men and women as equal members of the indentured underclass or are they suggestive of the will to efface the double marginalization of indentured women as a feminised underclass of recruits?

As mentioned above, Indian women were often positioned in jobs such as weeding and cleaning that were viewed as less demanding and remunerative than the jobs of digging and loading which were valued as male work. According to historian Madhavi Kale, the Demerara planter of British Guiana, John Gladstone, recommended that indentured women be paid at a lower rate than Indian men, which “evidently assumed that the women would be less productive labourers than Indian men would be... Even if women worked as many hours as men did, they would be paid less, on the grounds that labor itself (classified as ‘light’ work, or ‘women’s’ work) was of less value or less onerous than that performed by men.”^{xxvii} Tejaswini Niranjana claims that “there were skilled ‘men’s’ tasks (milling, forking, truck loading) and less-skilled ‘women’s’ tasks (such as weeding, manuring, supplying, and cane cutting, which were also the lowest-paid tasks). Even when women did heavy men’s tasks like truck loading, they were paid the same as other women. In 1870 and 1875, a fixed minimum wage was set for men at 25 cents; for women it was always less.”^{xxviii}

The gender wage disparity also placed indentured women in debt to traders and grocers, and in certain situations their rations were deducted from these already miniscule

wages.^{xxix} Indian women were therefore alienated from their labour in much larger measure than Indian men as much of their work was undervalued. Hidden in these images of Indian men and women working side by side is therefore the possibility of an economic contract in which Indian women, as subordinated labourers, were compelled into economic dependence on men. According to Niranjana, “low wages drove women to increased dependence on male partners, although they sometimes were able to negotiate the terms of such dependence.”^{xxx} This translated into a greater degree of marginalization and dehumanization as Indian women were constituted as a racialized and gendered underclass.

Making respectable “wives” out of “whores”

The many paintings and postcard photographs of Indian women in the West Indies, especially from the 1870s onwards, reveal much more about the evolving power of colonial media forms to frame the projects of history. While it is difficult to dispute the rising importance of visual currency in the late nineteenth century, images of “coolies” reflected the social and historical context of indentureship as a laboratory for re-making Indian women in Western-Creole society. Images of Indian women in sketches of “coolie families” or postcard photographs reveal less about their natural ontological selves than it does about their constructedness as regulated subjects in the context of Victorian codes of gender rationality, especially regarding respectability.^{xxxi} Images such as *Coolie Family* and *Coolie Woman*^{xxxii} painted by Michel Jean Cazabon, a Trinidadian Creole artist in the 1880s, are resonant with the project of constructing Indian women’s respectability. In the midst of growing opposition in India to indentureship these images might be considered colonial propaganda of a restored “sexual contract” between East Indian indentured men and women.^{xxxiii} By casting “coolies” as immoral subjects of the East, made respectable by Western modernity (in this case specifically under the indentureship system), these images served to neutralise any criticisms about the (Anglo) civilising power of the indentureship system.

According to Prabhu Mohapatra, the 1850s to 1870s witnessed an increasing spate of “wife murders” among the East Indian population in Trinidad and British Guiana, as “promiscuous coolie” women were murdered by their “cuckolded coolie” husbands.^{xxxiv} By casting Indian women as lecherous whores and Indian men as violently jealous,^{xxxv} official and lay colonial discourse viewed the moral depravity of “coolies” as justification for colonial intervention.^{xxxvi} Indian women, more so than Indian men, were however held accountable for this depravity, and as such required a specific regime of regulation that aligned them with Victorian measures of womanhood. The response by colonial official discourse to the incidence of murders of Indian women was to categorise this violence as “wife murder,” which according to Mohapatra, “collapsed a variety of relationships between plantation men and women”. Indian women were thus expected to be and referred to as “reputed wives” and the men, “reputed husbands”, under colonial marriage laws (1880s).^{xxxvii} Within this simplistic logic, murdered Indian women were viewed in official discourse as “unfaithful wives” deserving punishment while Indian men were referred to as “cuckolded husbands” driven by a certain essential nature. The discourse of moral bankruptcy of the “coolie” is echoed and reinforced throughout the colonial archive. Captain and Mrs. Swinton, in their *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie*

Emigrants from Calcutta to Trinidad (1859) had already begun to impress on British audiences the idea of “coolies” as cultural others by constructing a case around “immorality”. Mrs. Swinton wrote as follows:

They have no morality whatever: if they fancy each other, they become man and wife for the time being, and change again when they please. The parents of girls will sell their children for a few rupees. I may here mention that in the island, and on the plantations which I visited, I found the same immorality was carried on, and no provision for instructing them in Christianity; on the contrary, their own heathen processions were allowed to be carried on, but good care was taken of their bodies, as there was a doctor to take charge of them.^{xxxviii}

Similarly, J. A. Froude exclaimed that “the coolies have the fiercer passions of their Eastern blood. Their women being few are tempted occasionally into infidelities, and would be tempted more often...”^{xxxix} Unwilling to admit that this trend was in main caused by the conditions of indenture, colonial officials resorted to Orientalist (i.e. culturalist) and naturalist explanations that explained “wife murder” either as an East Indian phenomenon or *naturally* the result of a high male-to-female ratio.^{xl} Rather than suspect the indenture system, Mohapatra claims that official discourse “staged the phenomenon of wife murder as a morality play” between “unfaithful wives” and “cuckolded husbands” caused by “natural cultural traits of the Coolies and the natural consequence of an unbalanced sex ratio on the plantations”.^{xli} These explanations served to discursively manage “coolie” men and women in distinct ways so as to restore the ideal of the Indian family as a rational element of colonial governance. The Protector of Immigrants in Trinidad declared in 1881 that unchaste women were actually recruited from India, denying any claims that indenture could have any part to play in the situation.^{xlii} Indian women (by nature) were scripted as chattel, unchaste and morally depraved in an effort to naturalise colonial culturalist claims and justify the colonial civilising agenda. Similarly, Indian men were constructed as prone to jealousy and naturally violent. On the other hand, the murder of Indian women was seen to be a “natural” result of the low proportion of women to men, despite the ratio of imported indentured women to men being raised from 25% to 40% in 1868.^{xliii} Mohapatra emphasises that the phenomenon of “wife murder...was represented, and therefore understood, in a manner which denied the uniqueness of the circumstances, elided the disruption caused by indentured immigration, and emphasized continuities, both cultural and psychological.”^{xliv}

Reddock locates “wife murder” discourse within a larger area of concern known as the “Indian Woman Problem”.^{xlv} She claims that changes in recruitment of women vis-à-vis men “reflected the difficulties and contradictions in recruiting *more* women at the same time as recruiting ‘the right kind of women’.”^{xlvi} These “contradictions” emerged in relation to “the planters’ short-term preference for adult male migration and their long-term need for a self-producing, cheap and stable labour force.”^{xlvii} Reddock further adds that “single pregnant women,” “known prostitutes” and “coarse low caste females” were disqualified in favour of a “better class of women”.^{xlviii} Culturalist and naturalist

arguments made way for disciplinary discourses and institutional arrangements which invested colonial officials and the indenture system with the power to restore the sexual contract between Indian men and women. Mohapatra claims as follows:

Marriage laws were formulated to ensure orderly access to women's bodies, by curbing the 'immoral' nature of the women and channelize [sic] the violent instincts of men. The image of the family that the colonial state gradually inscribed into the law of marriage was a patriarchal one which assigned to the woman the role of reproducer.^{xlix}

By legally bolstering the image of the Indian family, colonial discourse sought to restore the moral contract between Indian men and women. This contract was bolstered by another contract between two co-present patriarchies, one European and the other more subordinated, racialized, "coolie" patriarchy. By reconstructing Indian women as respectable subjects, European patriarchy, though not giving up full control over women's labouring and reproducing functions, acquiesced to Indian men limited custodial control over Indian women's bodies and mobility, while retaining the power to regulate Indian patriarchy in the name of moral governance. This contract aimed to foreclose the possibility of sexual liaisons between Indian women and Afro-Creole men, especially since ethnic miscegenation between the two colonized groups would threaten the rationalisation logic of morality for both patriarchies — it would threaten Indian men's control over Indian women, which would in turn destabilise the former's labour efficiency. In addition, the increasing costs of importing fresh labour were offset by the pressure exerted on Indian women as "reputed wives" to literally reproduce plantation labour. These measures imposed a Victorian regime of domesticity on Indian women. Discursively contained and managed as "wives" and mothers, the respectability of Indian women was premised on their unfreedom — the possibilities for mobility, self-determination, and sexual agency were severely curtailed by legal and customary disciplinary measures that made them tentatively rational subjects.

M. J. Cazabon's paintings of "coolie" families and women were produced at the height of this colonial anxiety as colonial propaganda that reflected the restoration of the East Indian family and the moralising claims of indenture. Cazabon's portrayal of the well-dressed "coolie" woman in the *Coolie Family*^l served to invert the distorted image of the morally depraved "infidel" as a means of imaging the return to moral order via respectability. According to Mohapatra, these colonial images of "coolie" families also reflect the discursive "creation of a family from an amorphous mass of coolies".^{li} In the colonial archive, word images abound of happy "coolie" families, chaste-looking "coolie" women, and "coolie" gentlemen, accompanied by "coolie" children that frame Indian women's respectability in terms of regulated sexuality i.e. mothering, sexual control (acquiescence?), and implied heteronormativity. Victorian travel writer Charles Kingsley made numerous references to "coolie women" as "clever and delicate little women"^{lii}, "bedizened in jewels, bangles, and long graceful Indian shawls of harmonious hues", possessing "every attitude, gesture, tone, ...full of grace; of ease, courtesy, self-restraint, dignity..."^{liii} Likewise, he scripted coolie men as "graceful, pleasant and fond of children" which tentatively recuperated their image as paternal subjects aligned with

Victorian codes of respectability. Hence, while these word descriptions and images worked to instantiate the coolie as a contained cultural outsider, they also double-registered as a mark of the success of indenture in civilising coolies through the institution of the nuclear family. The images are therefore reflective of the discursive disciplinary apparatus of colonial rule and its gendered nuances.

Ranking colonial women: Respectability and corruptibility

On his 1888 travelogue *Down the Islands*, E.A. Paton orients himself in relation to the many colonial women he encounters, doing so by marking the differences between these categories of women. According to Mimi Sheller, “Paton’s photographic eye aligns the Coolie woman alongside the similarly posed Martinican woman, who serves as a point of reference so that their differences can be compared. The crucial points of comparison for him are their clothing, jewellery, skin tone, facial features, and style of movement.”^{liv} Racial and ethnic differences were therefore important to the gendered calibration and positioning of colonial subjects. Conditioned by the British colonizer’s intent on reducing wages via labour competition, both “Hindoos” and “negroes” in Trinidad and British Guiana were measured on the Victorian yardsticks of industry. Rationalising the indentured system of labour, Charles Kingsley’s symbolic elevation of the labouring “coolie” subject was made possible by his vilification of the “negro.” This symbolic manoeuvring also reconstituted and relied on the inscription of a moral discourse that conditionally conferred civilised status upon “coolies,” while “negroes” were denigrated as lazy and morally degenerate. On the grounds of labour and culture, therefore, both “negroes” and “coolies” were constructed and managed vis-à-vis each other, as inhabiting a comparative difference from two contentious positions. While the colonial visual archive does not seem to depict moments and scenes of co-presence of Indian women with women of different ethnic groups, the juxtaposition of separate images produced within the same period might allow for a relational reading of the ranking of Indian women vis-à-vis other groups of colonial women.

Hierarchies among women in colonial society were gendered derivatives of the general social structure in Creole society. White women were tentatively positioned at the very apex of a morally sanctioned ladder of femininity^{lv}, while Creole women were viewed as closely approximating standards of respectability. At the bottom of this hierarchy, Chinese, Indian and black women competed for the next ranking, a sort of approximation to subaltern-rank respectability,^{lvi} and were ostracised in measure with their risk of corruptibility in certain situations. As a result of the disciplining of Indian women’s place in the nuclear family, their respectability was used to measure black women’s respectability. This antagonistic definition of femininity between black and Indian women could only be defined in proximity to the unattainable measures of white and Creole women’s subjecthood; their tentativeness evaluated on their risk of transgressing Creole society’s codes of respectability. Captioning the image *Waiting for the Races*, Charles Kingsley substitutes the “Hindoo woman” for the “negress” as the new visual icon of subaltern-rank respectability:

The hobby-horses swarmed with Negresses and Hindoos of the lower order. The Negresses, I am sorry to say, forgot themselves, kicked up their legs, shouted to the bystanders, and were altogether incondite. The Hindoo women, though showing much more limbs than the Negresses, kept them gracefully together, drew their veils round their heads, and sat coyly, half frightened, half amused, to the delight of their ‘papas,’ or husbands...^{lvii}

If we are to take Kingsley’s codes of respectability seriously, the relative postures of the Indian and black woman suggest that respectability is not only conformity with Eurocentric notions of feminine roles, but intricately tied to representational cues such as dress, comportment, and particular nuances of interaction. The burden of respectability is placed specifically on “coolie” women, in direct opposition to Kingsley’s “negress” of ill-repute. For example, the Indian woman stands “gracefully” as opposed to the “negresses” who “kicked up their legs”. At the same time the Indian woman is symbolically elevated as a disciplined feminine subject, Kingsley expunges the “negress” from the ranks of feminine respectability, making her sub-human, by masculinising her. In other parts of his visual verbiage he gender-bends the “negress” as “coarse” and possessing “super abundant animal vigour”, as the referent against which Indian women’s “grace” is measured. In this antagonistic manoeuvre it appears as if there is little conceptual space even within subaltern-rank respectability for multiple and equal subject formations. Alternatively, Mimi Sheller claims that Kingsley’s descriptions of “coolies” and “negroes” were aimed at “representing degrees of racial difference”.^{lviii} Another interesting observation in *Waiting for the Races* is that the Indian woman faces away from the image interface while the black and Chinese women are in conversation, though in their own racialized groups. Encased by her children and “papa”, as mother and “wife”, she is left faceless, voiceless, expressionless, implying unquestioned consent with this casting. Yet Kingsley reminds us that even in her silence, her respectability is tentative, made so, only by a measurable and comparable other, for her limbs are more exposed than those of the “negress”. Her exposed limbs call attention to the possibility of moral slippage and sensual corruption by inviting male fantasy. This slippage is also bolstered by the cultural otherness of Indian women, whose *oriental* dress define her as a culturally saturated alien, with little ability to adapt to the appropriate cultural codes of femininity in a Creole society.

If in the pro-establishment eyes of colonial travellers we read the project of ranking Indian women above black women, the paintings of Creole artist M. J. Cazabon of colonial women reflect the flip side of this dynamic, in which black women were conceded greater access to respectability than Indian women. Daniel Segal argues that “though ‘Africans’ and ‘East Indians’ were both deemed inferior to ‘Europeans’, their subordination differed in semantic structure.”^{lix} Specifically resonant with Kingsley’s *Waiting for the Races* and Cazabon’s portraits of colonial women is Segal’s point, that while the “Negro” was culturally empty and prone to approximating “respectability”, the “Coolie” was viewed as culturally saturated and in contrast to the “Negro”. It is on this scale of cultural contrast that Segal allows us to assess Cazabon’s portraiture in terms of the relative greater access of black women than Indian women to Creole femininity. One

might even argue that Cazabon's catalogue, distinct from Kingsley's imagery, could also be bolstered by an impulse to normalise Creole derivatives of respectability as a narrative of indigeneity, in which case the Indian woman becomes the sole indispensable other against which to configure this project.

Beth Fowkes-Tobin who analyses the "semiotics of clothing" in Agostino Brunias's eighteenth-century images of mulatresses in the British and French West Indies, opines that his ethnographic art "are taxonomic images of specimens, not representations of individuals".^{lx} Similarly M. J. Cazabon's repeated portrayals of Trinidad's coloured Creole women^{lxi} is quite striking not only from the perspective of exoticizing women of the mulatto segment (to which Cazabon belonged), but as a form of classification as an almost-ideal supplemental social type of feminine respectability i.e. the Creole "lady," against which to calibrate "negro" and "coolie" women. Paintings like *Creole Woman with a Parasol* not only depict the clothing styles of a cultured Creole segment, but are an attempt to impose distinctly European conventions of representation (particular styles of comportment, for instance) on Creole women — a sort of compromise or derivative of European codes, as a means of naturalising and normalising Creole codes of feminine respectability. Cazabon's images of free coloured women with parasols and gala dresses served to frame them within very European conventions of portraiture — their posture, comportment and Creole dress code as powerful subtleties of West Indian respectability. Read within the context of an incipient Creole nationalism in the nineteenth century, Cazabon's Creole ladies sought to establish Creole femininity as the indigenous referent against which other social types of women were evaluated and about which a hierarchy of social types would be ranked in relation to Creolist agendas. Yet at the same time images like *Creole Woman with a Parasol* disturb and tentatively displace the hegemony of white female respectability, while they continue to entrench mainstream colonist productions of subaltern black and Indian women.

Cazabon's renditions of *Negress in Gala dress* and *Old Negress, French*,^{lxii} in *Gala Dress* in clothing similar to the coloured Creole woman collapses the social distinction between these two groups (Negress and Creole woman). Implied in this comparison is the "negress" as aspiring to subjecthood through a Creole feminine sensibility (though this might be read beyond unconscious mimicry). The effect of this visual comparison translates into a blurring of the cultural and class distinctions between the coloured Creole woman and the Negress, probably as a means of visually amalgamating coloured and ex-slave segments in the interest of widening the platform for nationalist claims. If Cazabon's Creole women and "negresses" come into close alignment to support a coloured nationalist agenda, this registers in relation to the East Indian woman in Cazabon's painting *Coolie Woman*. At the same time Cazabon extends his exoticizing gaze on the "coolie woman" as a social type, his depiction of her Oriental dress stamps her as culturally inferior, beyond the codes of Creole respectability. Here the Indian woman's alienness is not only assessed in relation to the "negress", but in relation to the rank and file of Creole womanhood. Though her deflected gaze suggests restraint, Cazabon's subtle visual cues of the "coolie woman's" partial head coverage and the short length of her skirt (in relation to the depicted Creole and Negro women) hint at the ease of slippage into sexual corruption and moral depravity, posing, from the perspective of

the Creole gaze, questions about the tentativeness of Indian women's respectability. These questions of feminine quality and suitability resonate with already circulating ideas of Indian women's immorality in the context of "wife" murder discourse.

These visual distinctions beg an extended inquiry into whether the rise of Creole nationalist agendas, in competition with Anglo-hegemony, was premised on the deployment of Orientalist discourses,^{lxiii} setting East Indians as the prime cultural others against which coloured and black segments amalgamated claims for self-determination. In this vein, Cazabon's catalogue of colonial women bears testimony to the dynamic and ambivalent positioning of Indian women in relation to complex and entangled colonial projects. Though anti-colonial in terms of symbolically elevating, normalising and indigenizing Creole women's respectability, Cazabon's images are reflective of a desire to re-position the "negress" in close proximity to a culturally-encoded configuration of respectability, coupled with another desire to distance the "coolie" woman from the very same benchmark of indigenized female subjecthood. This re-mapping of indigeneity on the basis of gender and race not only re-fixed these women in a social hierarchy aimed at bolstering Creole nationalist claims, but also extended to Creole men the privilege of ranking racialized women and possibly reconfiguring colonial relations.

The provisional Sable Venus: Indian women as sensual fetish

At the same time that colonial discourse sought to measure, control, and rationalise Indian women's sexuality, it paradoxically fetishized them as innocent for the consuming phallo-centric gaze of white masculinity as male British travel writers unleashed their own sexual and sensual desires on "coolie" women. These racially coded constructions of intimacy and desire were underwritten by regimes of truth that Ann Laura Stoler has referred to as the "carnal knowledge of race and the intimate in colonial rule".^{lxiv} Similarly, Sheller claims that these women's bodies were used to gauge the "relative distance between places, and *orient* the male traveler".^{lxv} This "distance between places" is both physical and ideological, as colonial anthropologists struggled to define the relation between East and West in ways that authenticated a westernised story of modernity. The configuration of relations between European male travellers and Indian women in the West (Indies) is therefore a worldly matter of reiterating and compounding grand narratives, though these relations must confront the nuances of geographical and historical specificity. The frontispiece to Edward Paton's 1888 travelogue, *A Hindu Cooly Belle*, portrayed a young East Indian woman in sari, bedizened with jewelry, her gaze deflected away from the gaze of the viewer, and walking in the town of Demerara, British Guiana.

Paton repeatedly referred to her as "a young girl", "a young Hindoo lady", and an "Aryan kinswoman", which not only sensualized the "coolie belle" but also conferred on her a mark of respectability. His detailed catalogue of her Aryan-like physiognomic features and her numerous "quaint" adornments made her "ethereal" and a "Goddess of the Dawn". At the same time, threatened by the implications of being "bewildered and bewitched", Paton referred to the "coolie belle" as "a typical woman of an ancient race" and remarked that "*except for her sable colour* she might have served for a Caucasian beauty."^{lxvi} It is this exceptionality that naturalises her approximation to Paton's Victorian

codes of feminine beauty and respectability, always a degree removed from the ideal of the authentic (white) Venus and, in this particular context, another degree removed from the already enchanted Creole woman (the original Venus supplement). Perhaps it is in the context of competing hegemonies, one Anglo and the other Creole,^{lxvii} that Paton is scanning the landscape for a more malleable and innocent sable Venus subject who will be compelled into his “in-cumming” gaze. Yet, in light of the previous discussion, we must understand the Indian woman’s “sable-ness” as provisional, a move that reveals more about the speculative nature, rather than the ontological power of colonial discourse. The real “sable” is that which is in part constituted and naturalised by whiteness. This tentativeness is possibly related to the tension between the demands for Indian women’s respectability (depicted as clothed figures) and the opposing desire to pornographize her i.e. to imaginatively undress her as a sexual object devoid of agency. Yet the coolie Sable Venus is not portrayed naked as the white or mulatto Venus^{lxviii}, though there is some hint of exposure, for example in Cazabon’s *Coolie Woman*, in which her arms and lower legs/feet are exposed. It is this subtle visual tentativeness that calibrates coolie women on the continuum of respectability and sensual fetish, constructing a permeable boundary, permitting an opportunity for intimacy that transgresses both moral and racial boundaries.

In her analysis of West Indian colonial iconography, Patricia Mohammed illuminates the ways in which the colonial gaze slotted racialized women (the indigenous woman, the black washerwoman, the mulatto woman) into a hierarchy of Venuses for the purposes of rationalising fantasies of intimacy.^{lxix} The figure of the “coolly belle” signals an attempt by the male colonial gaze to insert the new contender for the position of Sable Venus (previously occupied by mulatto women) within this racialized and gendered continuum of what Mohammed refers to as an evolutionary series of “analogous” Venuses, as a way of entitling and regulating intimacy with the feminised other. In fact, Paton’s “coolly belle” represents a deliberate attempt to set up an unfettered government of intimacy as the East Indian Sable Venus is brought into sharp focus at the same time that black and mixed women, as well as male others are deliberately made absent in the scene of Demerara. He reveals this strategy of interpellation as he encounters the “coolly belle”: “I should have passed her, had I not slackened my gait ... measuring my paces by hers, (I) followed behind the unknown wayfarer — respectfully and at a proper distance — to study and admire her....”^{lxx} Using one of Lowe’s definitions of intimacy as that of privacy,^{lxxi} I imply that Paton seems to desire a tentative interruption of public space (the Demerara street) so as to contemplate and sensate his more private desires (based on Victorian codes of desire). The power of Paton’s fetishizing gaze to suspend the rationality of moral codes and naturalise his flirtatiousness, without self-discipline (a sort of sexual licence), is testament to a tenuous double standard^{lxxii} encoded with assumptions of entitlement to asymmetrically frame and regulate the Sable Venus as a quasi-pornographic object.

Despite his attempts to frame the “coolly belle” as a tentative object of the traveller’s sensual pleasure, he mentioned that “she caught me looking at her, and smiled quizzically, as if she found me grotesque or outlandish in appearance”,^{lxxiii} implying that she was scrutinising and challenging his sensualizing gaze, even visually disciplining

Paton within the very contract of Victorian respectability. In Paton's *A Cooly Woman*, the woman returns the gaze with a sense of suspicion and a refusal to recognise Paton's attempt to fix her into the mould of the respectable and docile "Hindu lady" or "Sable Olympian goddess". Comparing this image to Paton's *Hindu Cooly Belle*, Sheller similarly asks whether the *Cooly Woman* is returning the "tourist gaze", for "she gazes steadfastly at the camera, she lifts her long hair provocatively, with hand on hip, and her skin tone darker and features less delicate."^{lxxiv} Paton, himself, and the British audience he is privileging through his gaze are made vulnerable and objectified by the *Cooly Woman*, i.e. he is disoriented. In fact, Lisa Lowe has argued that even within the folds of Orientalist thought there are particular locations for challenging colonial hegemony which occur in response to "an anxiety about, or consciousness of," the gaze of the Oriental.^{lxxv} Moreover, the "cooly woman" is expressing a certain degree of agency by refuting the strictures of respectability (e.g. her *active hands* drawing attention to her *unveiled* hair; *her gaze* returned at the voyeur^{lxxvi}), refusing sexual scrutiny by the colonial eye — she actively deploys "vanity" as resistance and self-determination as if to reclaim her own narcissistic power.^{lxxvii} Perhaps it is this antagonistic gaze which, if directed in unity with those of other Sable Venuses (and there is a noted absence of images of co-mingling among colonial women), might render impotent the interpellative and regulative power of this regime of colonial intimacy — producing what Lowe refers to an "other valence of intimacy"^{lxxviii} and perhaps, even more what Stoler refers to as a "racialized assessment of danger".^{lxxix} It is important to consider that this returned gaze is what suspends (albeit temporarily) Paton's sensualizing gaze, as it possibly forces him to also confront and honour the contract between Anglo and Indian patriarchies^{lxxx} in West Indian society that collaboratively governed East Indian women as respectable subjects. According to Stoler's work on the genealogy of the intimate, "the colonial measure of what it took to be classified as 'European' was based not on skin color alone but on tenuously balanced assessments of who was judged to act with reason, *affective appropriateness*, and a sense of morality"^{lxxxi}.

Perhaps one might glimpse East Indian women's agency as partly possible where boundaries are transgressed and there is a possibility to suspend or denaturalise dominant configurations of race and sexual intimacy. As mentioned earlier, Prabhu Mohapatra reads the plethora of images of "coolie" families as indicative of a "restored sexual contract" between Indian men and women. The contract was also one between European and Indian men to regulate Indian women's sexuality and mobility, as well as to address fears about subaltern racial intermixture between blacks and Indians. For Indian men this fear was entrenched within colonial stereotypes about the moral depravity of blacks and anxieties about inter-ethnic competition, while for white men, this fear was heightened by the implied exclusivity of non-European constitutions of sexual intimacy and ethnic miscegenation. In the context of creolization, Sheller claims that miscegenation threatened the "racial order and the gender order" which underpinned white colonial privilege. The systematic absence of images of ethnic co-mingling might be interpreted as a repeated and conscious anxiety about illicit sexual "mixture and unstable boundaries".^{lxxxii} Indeed, the very image of proximity between Indians and racialized others in the West Indies could threaten the claims about cultural imperviousness and anti-miscegenation that were rationalising strands of "coolie" governance.

In the painting entitled, *View of Port-of-Spain from Laventille Hill*, M. J. Cazabon provocatively illuminates this threat of sexual (and possibly cultural) miscegenation and at the same time recirculates assumptions about the immoral “coolie” woman transgressing geographical, racial and sexual boundaries. Sited at the right lower margins of Laventille Hill, a distinctly black suburban space, is a faint figure of an Indian woman. Given that the labouring Indian population was settled on or around the plantations and segregated in main part from the black population, it is interesting to the author why Cazabon should deliberately image such an unnatural intimacy between racialized and gendered others. The limited restoration of Indian patriarchal control in the “coolie” family naturalised black men and Indian women as co-present sexual strangers. *View of Port-of-Spain from Laventille Hill* is perplexing and ambiguous in this regard, yet it provokes a questioning about the seemingly dangerous proximities of colonial others and especially the implications for Indian women transgressing racially gendered boundaries. This sense of danger is evoked in one of Kingsley’s word images in which he encounters an Indian woman in the urban space of Port of Spain:

When you have ceased looking — even staring — at the black women and their ways, you become aware of the strange variety of races which people the city. Here passes an old Coolie Hindoo, with nothing on but his lungee round his loins...contrasting strangely with the brawny Negroes round. There comes a *bright-eyed* young lady, probably his daughter-in-law, hung all over with bangles, in a white muslin petticoat, crimson cotton-velvet jacket, and green gauze veil, with her naked brown baby aside on her hip; *a clever smiling delicate woman, who is quite aware of the brightness of her own eyes.*^{lxxxiii}

Kingsley’s casting of the “bright-eyed” and “clever” young lady who is “aware of the brightness in her own eyes” registers the possibility of lessened restraint and a risky moral corruptibility in a space of dense co-presence with “the black women and their ways”. In light of the foregoing discussions about the ethnic antagonisms within the ranks of subaltern respectability, this unnatural co-presence, even between black and Indian women, needs to be further investigated in relation to processes of interculturalisation, assimilation, and negotiation. As one of the few lingering images of co-mingling between blacks and Indians, Cazabon’s *View of Port-of-Spain* animates numerous questions about the meanings and constitutive power of bracketed and unnatural intimacies (sexual and otherwise) within the discursive formation of what one might view as a peculiar West Indian derivative of Orientalism.^{lxxxiv}

Conclusion

This article has explored, through the use of nineteenth-century images, the optic construction and disciplining of indentured Indian women in the Anglo-Caribbean in relation to British and Creole notions of femininity. While images of labouring Indian women place them alongside Indian men, they mask the complexities of labour relations and the greater degree of alienation and fetishism of Indian female labour (the lowest category on the wage scale) as a commodity within the relations of plantation production.

Images of co-labouring also naturalise Indian women's marginal freedoms implied through their economic dependence on Indian men, who were rationalised as more crucial labouring subjects (though Indian men's wages were still lower than wages of free labourers). These seemingly neutral images are ideological formations in which both race and gender categories of otherness are organised and ranked within a moral economy of what might be termed "the rightful place of land, labour, capital".^{lxxxv}

This moral evaluation extended to the realm of culture and social life, especially in the context about concerns about Indian women's sexuality. The imaging of Indian women in families or as respectable subjects points to a project of optic surveillance and regulation, containing their freedom of mobility, sexual licence, and choices of survival. This served to bolster not only Anglo and possibly Creole hegemonies, but also restored to Indian patriarchy some measure of control over Indian women's bodies and lives. When M. J. Cazabon's paintings of the *Coolie Family* and *Coolie Woman* were featured at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886 in London, the figure of the Indian woman was indeed an exhibit of her disciplinary containment, reflective of the rationality of colonial governance and possibly her imposed self-governance as a consensual gendered subject — a sort of optical signature of colonial biopolitics. Yet, my reading of Cazabon's *View of Port of Spain* provokes a more disturbing reading about possibilities for agency, accommodation, assimilation and negotiation between Indian women and Creole society that might have contested dominant codes of respectability and selfhood.

The possibility of counter-narratives compels us to consider how we might magically excavate and reconfigure the colonial visual archive to reassemble optical regimes of truth that have eluded the dominant retina. In constructing Indian women as marginal and tentative members of colonial society through discourses of labour, respectability and sexuality, these visual catalogues calculatedly managed the moral contours of subaltern womanhood and possibly inscribed the limits of self-governance. Such a charged yet interested interpellation of the Indian woman as a category in colonial genealogy poses many challenges for how we might further manoeuvre optical discourses within the limits of a particular valence of modernity.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Charles Kingsley uses these “word paintings” to either interpret a lithograph or to selectively highlight the features of a scene as if the description was actually its total composition. Charles Kingsley, *At Last: a Christmas in the West Indies* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1871; reprint 1910).

ⁱⁱ Patricia Mohammed, “Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque”, *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007); Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006); Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean* (Routledge, London and New York, 2003).; and Beth Fowkes-Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ While these scholars represent work on the Caribbean, the study of race and colonial visualities is marked by a spate of prior theoretical insights in such works as Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); and Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Malek Alloula’s *The Colonial Harem* looks at colonial postcards and the ways in which they systematically framed Algerian women in differently exotic ways that constructed “the Orient” as a gendered and sexualized phantasm. One important analytical vein shared with this paper is the voyeuristic control and management of women’s mobility and sexuality as a process of naturalising (i.e. disciplining) colonial women as accessible, credible, and profitable. At the same time, this paper is also interested in the ways, similar to Alloula, in which the colonial eye is “dispossessed of his own gaze” that reveals its obsessive fetishism rather than realism (1986, 14). Focusing on the repertoire of Orientalist art in Britain and France, Reina Lewis’ *Gendering Orientalism* complicates the colonizing gaze through the works of Henriette Browne, to question the masculinist assumptions of the Orientalist gaze, differently registered by women artists. For Frederick Bohrer, nineteenth-century visual culture filtered, revised and reconstructed Assyria as a comprehensible category of knowledge in Western European consciousness. The author’s focus is on exoticism as a binaristic system of codes that produces and regulates subjects similar to Said’s work on Orientalism.

^{iv} The paper concerns specific moments pertaining to initial experimentation with Indian indentureship in the 1840s, the instability caused by the “wife murder” crisis of the 1860s, and re-stabilisation of the Indian family in the late nineteenth century. These three major moments illustrate the tension between the order and crisis imposed by the representational systems of indentureship.

^v Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 1. According to Lowe (2006, 196), “The British colonial archive is not a static, comprehensive collection of given facts or a source of recorded history. Following Foucault and Said, we must consider the archive as a site of knowledge production, ‘reading’ it as a technology for administering and knowing the colonized population that both attests to its own contradictions and yields its own critique.” This is not to suggest that colonial documents do not contain traces of, or even systematic, counter-knowledge formations, but they rather focus on the dominant production of colonial knowledge as a regulative practice that was moored in particular social institutions, exerting certain governing forces over the subjects produced within these discursive regimes. Lisa Lowe, “The

Intimacies of Four Continents”, in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

^{vi} In this article I use the terms Indian and East Indian, at times interchangeably, while in particular instances designating Indian women as East Indian is meant to underscore their categorical status as migrant women not from the West. At other times, the term Indian is used to call attention to more generic colonial attitudes, though not ignoring its inferior status in the East-West binary.

^{vii} Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 8.

^{viii} Viranjini Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?: East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 43.

^{ix} This is also connected to what was discursively debated at the time and referred to as “the negro problem.” See J. Millette, “The Wage Problem in Trinidad and Tobago 1838–1938”, in *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History*, ed. Bridget Brereton and Kevin Yelvington (Trinidad and Tobago: The Press, the University of the West Indies and Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

^x Selwyn Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries: the Intellectual Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the Nineteenth Century* (Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 2003), 65.

^{xi} Millette, “The Wage Problem in Trinidad and Tobago”.

^{xii} Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica 1845–1950* (University of Warwick: Centre for Research in Asian Migration and London: Peepal Tree Books, 1994).

^{xiii} During the period 1838–1917, 238,909 indentured labourers from India were brought to British Guiana, 143,939 to Trinidad, and 37,027 to Jamaica, initially all under five-year labour contracts. Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition: The Years After Slavery* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 107.

^{xiv} The category “coolie” was used in the nineteenth century to denote labourers, especially from Asia, who were contracted both coercively and voluntarily for work in the New World. The term is historically racialized and troubles the division between slave and migrant labour. In colonial discourse, the “coolie” was a constructed category of labour and culture that was allotted a very calculated degree of freedom and authenticity in the social hierarchies of colonial societies. See Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, 194, views the term as one in “a range of intermediate forms of coercive labour”. The term was derogatory by default, and its use in this article signals its significance as a historically situated social category of power relations.

^{xv} Despite the legality of contracts ensuring humane labouring conditions, East Indian indentureship was suspended between 1848–1851 as a result of anti-slavery sentiments in the colony and Britain claiming that the new labour arrangement bore abuses similar to slavery. Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition*.

^{xvi} Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881–1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

^{xvii} Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries*.

^{xviii} The term, “Creole”, refers to a person of mixed African/European ancestry, a person who is born in the New World, and/or a person of mixed cultural backgrounds. According to Brereton, nineteenth-century Trinidadian Creole Society was divided into three broad sectors, as a “useful organizational framework”, with a “dominant culture and subordinate culture” (1979, 7). At the top were French Creoles and British Whites, followed by an unusually large free coloured and black middle class, and then black and creole peasants at the bottom of the hierarchy. In her introduction to *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad*, Brereton details the complex ways in which these groups were distinguished from each other, while they experienced anomalies that made

them similar in some instances. Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870–1900*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). She also suggests that there were stratifications within each tier based on “cultural orientation, colour (shade), economic position, educational levels, and occupation.” Bridget Brereton, “Social Organisation and class, racial and cultural conflict in 19th century Trinidad,” in *Trinidad Ethnicity*, ed. K. Yelvington (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 40.

^{xix} This particular group was partially slave-owning, and though quite complex in its formation, derived its power socially and politically from its access to capital (especially plantations) and social institutions such as education and the government administration. Though biologically and culturally mixed, the free coloured segment regarded those aspects that were more European (e.g. white skin colour, European dress, etc.) as more civilised. Their capacity to exert power over the social hierarchy in an officially administered British colony was due in part to their large demographic size, their positioning as middle managers in the colony, and their incipient struggles for entitlement and colonial citizenship. See Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad*.

^{xx} Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*

^{xxi} Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*, 77.

^{xxii} Brereton, “Social Organisation and class”, 36.

^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, 41.

^{xxiv} Lisa Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 194.

^{xxv} Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

^{xxvi} Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 156.

^{xxvii} Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, 160.

^{xxviii} Tejaswini Niranjana, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration between India and Trinidad* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 64

^{xxix} *Ibid.*

^{xxx} *Ibid.*

^{xxxi} I use the term “respectability” in relation to Peter Wilson’s co-framing and gendered concepts of “reputation” and “respectability.” Wilson defines “respectability” as the aspiration of Afro-Caribbean women toward European norms or a closer proximation to the master class. Peter Wilson, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). Jean Besson, “Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women,” in *Women and Change in the Caribbean*, ed. Janet Momsen (London: James Curry Ltd., Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 6. Besson claims that the notion is premised on “class, colour, wealth, Eurocentric culture, lifestyle and education.” (*Ibid.*) Wilson contrasts this notion with that of “reputation” whereby he claims that Afro-Caribbean men struggled for more indigenous/autonomous modes of self-fashioning that were anathema to the master class. However, Besson’s (1993) analysis of these two concepts in the case study of Providence critiques the strict gendering of these concepts, while maintaining that they are imbued with power. Not only does she question whether reputation is exclusively a male domain, but she re-reads women’s lives to show how they also engaged in performances of reputation. Minimal work exists on the racialized construction of “reputation-respectability”. Segal (1993, 92) also writes that “respectability” was “a measure of approximation to whiteness” although his definition is based solely on skin colour.

^{xxxii} Both these paintings were exhibited at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1888.

^{xxxiii} Prabhu Mohapatra, "Restoring the Family: Wife Murders and the Making of a Sexual Contract for Indian Immigrant Labor in the British Caribbean Colonies, 1860-1920", *Studies in History* 11, no. 2 (1995): 227-260.

^{xxxiv} In Trinidad, "between 1872 and 1879, of the 102 total murders seventy-six were of women, of which fifty-nine were of wives." Mohapatra, "Restoring the Family", 232.

^{xxxv} While there is need for more in-depth analysis of the specific processes of racialization and engendering of East Indian men as a specific social category, some studies illumine their particular positioning as a racialized/ethnicized masculinity in the colonial hierarchy. See Patricia Mohammed, *Gender Negotiation among Indians in Trinidad 1917-1947* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

^{xxxvi} Not only did this image of depravity threaten the moral underpinnings of the picturesque labouring coolies, but it also sparked heated opposition by the Anti-Slavery society in London and the Government of India, strengthening the latter's pro-independence platform.

^{xxxvii} Mohapatra, "Restoring the Family", 233.

^{xxxviii} In Selwyn Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries: the Intellectual Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the Nineteenth Century* (Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 2003), 140.

^{xxxix} Froude, *The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses*, 67.

^{xl} According to Reddock (1994, 27) this ratio fluctuated "from one woman to every three men in 1857 to one to two in 1868 and one to four in 1878-79." Rhoda Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

^{xli} Mohapatra, "Restoring the Family", 233.

^{xlii} *Ibid.*, 235.

^{xliii} *Ibid.*, 231.

^{xliv} *Ibid.*, 233.

^{xl} Rhoda Reddock, "Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago 1845-1917", *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 43 (1985): 27.

^{xlvi} *Ibid.*, 29. Also see Tejaswini Niranjana "Left to the Imagination: Indian Nationalisms and Female Sexuality in Trinidad", *Small Axe* (September 1-18, 1997). Niranjana reflects on the other side of the argument in late nineteenth-century India, when Indian women's sexuality became a key consideration for a mounting nationalist critique of indentureship.

^{xlvi} *Ibid.*, 30.

^{xlvi} *Ibid.*, 29.

^{xl} Mohapatra, "Restoring the Family", 250.

¹ Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article, it should be pointed out that the narratives of these images are never closed and totalizing, but are always suggestive of multiply-nuanced readings. While this paper is emphatic about the control and governance of East Indian women as a visually discursive category of colonial regulation, it does not imply that images such as *Coolie Family* and *Coolie Woman* do not also reflect the struggle for cultural retention (i.e. agency). For example, Cazabon's *Coolie Family* might also speak to the regeneration of the Indian family in ways consistent with that social institution in India that might demand a more nuanced discussion of the interaction of different systems of respectability. It is possibly this route that demands urgent further exploration to shift the dynamic from an imposed European code of respectability on a seemingly morally depraved group to the (asymmetrical) co-existence of several variants of respectability.

^{li} Mohapatra, "Restoring the Family", 227.

^{lii} Kingsley, *At Last!*, 72.

^{lii} *Ibid.*, 100.

^{liv} Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 128.

^{lv} Though this is not to suggest that the colonial positioning of white women was not also based on the same patriarchal system of knowledge that subjected and regulated all women in the colony.

^{lvi} I employ the term subaltern-rank respectability *here* to imply that there was a specific ceiling of respectability permitted for women in the lower ranks of Creole society, and not to develop its other possible implication that these women might have also invented their own forms of respectability, counter to the dominant register (i.e. reputation). Within this subaltern rank, the “coolie” woman and “negress” are cast as competitors as they are indexed vis-à-vis each other through contradistinction.

^{lvii} Kingsley, *At Last!*, 305.

^{lviii} Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 126.

^{lix} Daniel Segal, “‘Race’ and ‘Colour’ in Pre-Independence Trinidad and Tobago,” in *Trinidad Ethnicity*, ed. K. Yelvington (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 94.

^{lx} Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 139.

^{lxi} For example: “Creole Woman with a Basket”, “Creole Woman in Green Dress”, “Creole Woman with a Parasol”, “Creole Woman seated”, “Blanchisseuse and Child”, “Blanchisseuse and Cows on Cocoa Estate”, “Seated Mulatto Beauty”, “Portrait of a Creole Lady”, etc.

^{lxii} It is possible that Cazabon aimed to draw rank distinction between black women who were in some way linked to the French Creole segment (to which Cazabon also belonged) and other black women.

^{lxiii} There is a well-documented history of the resistance of Creole society to the indentureship system, and the former’s endorsement and deployment of Orientalism as a discursive strategy of defence and management. See Viranjini Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?: East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ron Ramdin, *Arising From Bondage: A History of the Indo-Caribbean People* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2000); Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica 1845–1950* (University of Warwick: Centre for Research in Asian Migration and London: Peepal Tree Books, 1994); Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies 1838–1918* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881–1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

^{lxiv} Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press).

^{lxv} Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: from Arawaks to Zombies*, 124.

^{lxvi} Paton, *Down the Islands*, 178.

^{lxvii} This period is marked by the increasing advocacy on the part of Creole society for self-determination, part of which entails the contestation of Eurocentric conventions of framing and ranking colonial others. Though subordinate to and in competition with whites, the Creole middle class, especially, also benefited from and in many instances reinforced their dominant position over blacks and Indians within their own narrative of self-determination.

^{lxviii} The white Venus in *The Birth of Venus*, by Sandro Botticelli c. 1485–1486 and the brown Venus in Agostino Brunias’ *The West India Washerwoman* (late eighteenth century) are both depicted with some element of skin exposure.

^{lxix} Mohammed, “Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque”.

^{lxx} Paton, *Down the Islands*, 177.

^{lxxi} Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, 195.

^{lxxii} Stoler also discusses this double standard regarding concubinage of colonial women in Asia. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)

^{lxxiii} Paton, *Down the Islands*, 177.

^{lxxiv} Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 128.

^{lxxv} Lowe, *Critical Terrains*, 110.

^{lxxvi} The words in italics are meant to suggest the contestatory and renovative gestures by the “coolly woman” to re-organise herself in the History of the gaze.

^{lxxvii} Mohammed, “Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque”, 13. Mohammed sees this narcissistic sentiment in her analysis of the mulatto washer woman in the paintings of Agostino Brunias in Barbados whereby the Sable Venus (the mulatto washer woman) wishes the “viewer to see her as *she* sees herself.”

^{lxxviii} Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, 203.

^{lxxix} Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 58.

^{lxxx} This is not to assert that both patriarchies were always cooperative, as according to Stoler, the assertion of white supremacy required the “demaclinization of colonized men” at the same time that it afforded the “hypermasculinity of European males”. What is important, however, is that these racialized patriarchies were coterminous in sometimes cooperative and at other times competitive ways. Stoler claims that the casting of colonized women “was concerned with the psychological salience of women and sex in the subordination of men by men.” Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 46.

^{lxxxi} Italics are mine and meant to underscore the calculability and regulation of desire in relation to a wider referential regime of rationality. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 6.

^{lxxxii} Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, 203.

^{lxxxiii} Italics are mine. Kingsley, *At Last!*, 72.

^{lxxxiv} For example: Which subject is historically constituted as the ultimate stranger in this racialized and gendered visual grammar, and how does Orientalism cooperate with both dominant colonial and Creole discourses as an allied offensive intent on denying claims to indigeneity and notions of the ultimate sexual stranger?

^{lxxxv} K. Darian-Smith, L. Gunner and S. Nuttall, *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 241.



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Issue 2 – 2008

Matikor, Chutney, Odissi and Bollywood: Gender Negotiations in Indo-Trinidadian Dance

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Abstract

Four genres of Indo-Trinidadian dance—folk, film, chutney and classical—have opened spaces in which gender (as well as ethnic, national and class) identities are negotiated and chosen from an increasing variety of options. A women's folk dance, matikor, brought by the early indentured Indians, represents resistance to the control of female sexuality. The survival and modern-day popularity of matikor highlights the importance of dance in Indo-Trinidadian women's construction of identity in a diasporic setting. The importation of Indian (Bollywood) films to Trinidad opened up the realm of public performance for Indo-Trinidadian women, and dancing informed by Bollywood remains an arena in which women negotiate a plurality of both modern and traditional "Indian" roles. Chutney, a locally grown music and dance style, asserts female independence and self-determination through transgression of boundaries. Classical dance, despite appearances of conservatism, has created a new space for Indian women to gain respect and increased independence through mastery of classical forms. Changing attitudes toward women's dancing within the last century provide an index of evolving gender ideologies within the Indo-Trinidadian community.

Introduction

In the swirl of a performer's festival costume, the hennaed hands of a classical dancer, or the sequined gyrations of a masquerader, dance is inscribed with political and cultural meanings. People dance to resist oppression, and dance to affirm community. Judith Lynne Hanna describes dance as a "multiplicity": in addition to being physical behavior, it folds in elements of cultural, social, psychological, economic, political, and communicative behaviors, becoming a kind of "text in motion" (1987, 4). It has even been argued that the communicative powers of dance exceed those of written and spoken language (Polhemus 1993, Hanna 1987). Academic scholarship is increasingly interested in the study of dance, because of its ability to shed light on cultural politics (Desmond 1997; Thomas 2003; Reed 1998).

Dance is more political than politics

Dances in Trinidad are born of many layers of history and overlapping cultures—the legacies of slavery and indenture, post-colonial influences, and discourses of modernity and diaspora. To interpret the depth of meaning of these dances, they must be historicized and contextualized. Cynthia Novack (1995) outlines three interacting facets to be examined—the "art" (the choreographic structures, movement styles, and techniques of dance); the institutions (local, national, global) in which it is practiced and performed; and the people who participate as performers, producers, spectators, and commentators (181). Incorporating this contextualization, dance scholarship has the ability to inform on "the history of fluctuating events" (181), and can "participate in dialogues...about the most personal articulations of political forces and social power" (182). In other words, individual dancers have the power to analyze and respond to the greater cultural framework.

Four discernible genres of East Indian dance exist in Trinidad today—folk, film, chutney, and classical. The histories of these genres intertwine and overlap and, further, individual dancers can perform more than one kind of dance or even blend genres in one performance. These dances are separated, however, according to a general consensus and sense of boundaries existing in Trinidad's dance community.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate how these four genres of Indo-Trinidadian dance create spaces in which gender identities are negotiated—and how women participating in each genre assert gradations of independence and self-determination, even in dances culturally coded as "appropriate" or "conservative." I engage a (Caribbean) feminist theoretical framework, following the premise that gender, ethnicity, nationality and class are interlocking systems that must be analyzed together. Adhering to Novack's model of contextualization, I draw in aspects of the "art," institutions, and audience reaction/participation. The study is grounded in the historical context of Indo-Trinidadian women's experiences of marginalization in Trinidadian culture.

Indo-Trinidadian identity

Trinidad and Tobago is a dual-island nation in the South Caribbean, with a total population of about 1.3 million. There is no majority ethnic population; today, the

makeup is about 40% East Indian, 40% African, with the remaining 20% mixed, Chinese, Syrian, Portuguese, and others.¹ Occupied in turn by Spanish, French, and most recently British forces, slavery of African peoples took place here. After slavery was outlawed in the British Commonwealth in 1838, a system of indentured servitude from India was implemented, beginning in 1845. East Indians would continue to arrive in Trinidad until 1917, when indenture was made illegal. Although the conditions of indenture offered repatriation after the contract was up, most remained in Trinidad, claiming small parcels of land in exchange for the passage home.

Several factors in Trinidad changed the East Indians' way of life. For instance, according to Hindu beliefs, the act of crossing a large body of water meant defilement and erasure of caste status (Munasinghe 2001, 71). Indian dialects were gradually lost to English. With losses such as caste and language, however, other cultural markers such as music and dance took on greater symbolic importance (Manuel 1998, 21). Indian cultural and gender identities suffered rupture in Trinidad as certain practices were reinstated, others reformed, and others lost.

When indentured East Indians came to Trinidad, far more men came than women, shifting the gendered balance of power within the group. Ramabai Espinet describes the advantages of this situation for Indian women:

Scarcity increased their value as sexual partners and their wage-earning ability increased their independence. Indian women refused to accept bad treatment from husbands or lovers, and would leave rather than put up with such treatment (1993, 46).

The new-found abilities of Indian women to earn wages and leave abusive relationships represented a marked contrast to their social realities within the patriarchal system in India, which Espinet cites as having a "single germinating centre—the ownership of woman and her reproductive capacity" (43). Patricia Mohammed has written that a system of "competing patriarchies" in Trinidad added further pressure to Indian men's understanding of their own masculinity: accustomed to superior masculine status in India, Indian men now had to contend with European and African systems of patriarchy which were already vying for dominance in Trinidad (2002, 11). Despite their increased leverage and Indian patriarchy's relegation to non-dominant status, Indo-Trinidadian women still remained a marginalized group (within a marginalized group), enmeshed in processes of negotiating gender identity in a complex, multi-cultural setting.

Mohammed's (2002) concept of gender negotiation is basically this: in the new context of Trinidad, Indian men and women entered into a series of negotiations to forge "a new set of gender arrangements, and thus a negotiation with patriarchy itself" (12). These negotiations are not necessarily overt or logical, but can take place subtly in everyday situations, and involve "varying degrees of collusion, compromise and accommodation, resistance and subversion" (15). Further, negotiations are continually contested and can take place between groups and institutions as well as between individuals.

Through the history of the East Indian presence in Trinidad, negotiations of Indo-Trinidadian (gender, ethnic, class and national) identities have been influenced by processes of creolization,ⁱⁱ

a term which implies syncretism with the English-based, “Afro-Saxon” cultural mainstream identified with blacks, whites, and mulattos, and including such prominent entities as steelband, Carnival, and calypso. The creolization process has become particularly marked since the mid-twentieth century, as Indians have increasingly urbanized, modernized, forsaken Hindi for English, and in general come to enter [Trinidad’s] socio-economic and political mainstreams (Manuel 1997, 21).

Although creolization implies hegemony of the (Afro-Trinidadian) mainstream, processes of creolization allow for plural identities—Indo-Trinidadians can relate both to their East Indian traditions as well as to the mainstream, and indeed, to a mainstream national culture they increasingly co-create. Rhoda Reddock (1998) notes that contestations over national culture in Trinidad are ongoing, and as more groups seek to define themselves in this setting, this process “...could provide a basis for a more truly inclusive national and indeed regional identity” (435).

The celebration and culture of Carnival are at the heart of “creole” Trinidadian dance and performance traditions. The history of Carnival is rich and complex, and like Trinidad itself, born of many influences.ⁱⁱⁱ Mainstays of this celebration are steelpan bands, calypso music, and *mas* (masquerade). Carnival *mas*^{iv} represents a ritual outlet—its values are mass participation, spontaneity, and the inversion of boundaries. Other performance traditions in Trinidad are juxtaposed against this set of values (often referred to as “Carnival culture” or “Carnival mentality”) and react around it, some reflecting these values, and others pointedly resisting.

Participation in a certain type of dance is one way of asserting identity—a dancer circumscribes him- or herself within a dance’s perceived set of social meanings—to affirm them, to defy them, or redefine them. Susan Reed (1998) writes that dance “cultivates a body that initiates as well as responds” to a set of cultural values (421), and that performers “invent and reinvent identities through movement” (427). Similarly, Novack (1995) states that “dance may reflect *and* resist cultural values simultaneously.” Hanna (1998) cites dance’s unique positioning to “resist”:

Distanced from the everyday, a dance performance...permits exploration of dangerous challenges to the status quo, without the penalties of the everyday life situation” (196).

Like other human ritual, dance as theatrical performance “frames messages, and thereby bestows power on them” (Hanna 1998, 196). The messages framed by dance performance are co-created by an audience. Ann Daly (1995) has developed the idea of “reception as

co-creation,” stating that the dancing body is a site of cultural discourse, and the meaning of a performance is constructed through a dialogue between the dancer and the audiences.

Resistance against marginalization is a theme that unites the different genres of Indo-Trinidadian women’s dance. Part of the experience of Indo-Trinidadian women’s marginalization in Trinidadian culture has been their relative absence from what Ramabai Espinet calls “that sphere of influence which produces public figures, writers, artists, politicians, performers and other persons of impact and influence” (1993, 42). Indo-Trinidadian women, she continues, have been “present but unseen” (42). This is certainly shifting in Trinidad, and the study of gender negotiations within the development of dance genres provides an index of this change.

Folk dance

East Indian folk dances are informed by the lifestyle of a particular region in India. Generally, a folk dance is performed in a recurring circle motif, movements are less controlled than in classical dance forms, and there are more vigorous movements of the dancers through the performance space. In addition to regional specificity, folk dances are also specific to certain occasions:

In India, there was a folk dance if there was a baby born—it was celebrated; if there was a crop and it was good, it was celebrated, if there was a wedding. Every festive occasion had a specific dance. It happened in Trinidad as well, but to a lesser extent (Sandra Sookdeo, personal communication, December 19, 2005).

The first East Indians to arrive Trinidad would have brought knowledge of these regional folk dances, but because they came from lower classes in India, they would not have had access to classical dance. What these people would have brought to Trinidad, as embodied knowledge, are the regionally specific folk dances of their villages.^v In the context of Trinidad, these folk dances were probably acted as a form of resistance to encroaching westernization. These dances would have been performed as acts of collusion within the Indian communities themselves—not on a public stage, and certainly not for an audience of people of other ethnicities.

Today, East Indian dancers in Trinidad generally agree that a few types of folk dance made it to Trinidad, including the *charu*, a dance done with brooms; as well as a dance called *ras leela*, in which dancers hold sticks in each hand, striking them together in time to music. Lisa Bissoon, a classical dancer in the *Kathak* style, tells me that other, less formal dances were done during the early period of indenture:

Mostly in that time, they wouldn’t have known what they were doing. In the evening, these villagers would be sitting around and there would be a group of men sitting together and a group of women sitting together, the ladies wouldn’t mix a lot with the men. And the men would drink some rum, and maybe sing a little song, and that would be what we call a folk song. And the women would sit together and

maybe tap a little drum or tap a little bucket and some of them would dance. But there was no name to the song, there was no name to the dance (personal communication, May 4, 2006).

Bissoon stresses that in the early period of indenture, East Indian men and women would be dancing separately. And indeed, at this time, women's dancing in public and excursions into public in general would have been controlled, despite their increased social leverage. Several older Indo-Trinidadian women told me that during their childhoods, it was unacceptable for them to dance, that they would be considered "loose," it would be a shameful activity for them.

There was a folk dance in which women were sexually explicit, however—the *matikor*^{vi} ceremony. Matikor is a women-only ceremony performed as part of a Hindu wedding, a practice brought from India as embodied knowledge. The ceremony would take place somewhere near a source of running water:

On the Friday night before a wedding, the bride would get turmeric paste and yogurt all over her body to make a nice complexion and as purifying agents. Then there would be a procession which would take you to a river or a place with a pipe; there would be a little ritual and then after there would be drummers, *tassa* drummers, men who form a circle. Only women were allowed inside there, and the women will now be both dancers, women will portray men. There are only women allowed inside the circle. There is a little bit of vulgarity, and only women see this. The meaning of the dance is for the fertility of the couple. (Sandra Sookdeo, personal communication, December 19, 2005)

As Sookdeo alludes to here, the matikor ceremony was done in order to educate the bride about the sexual act. Older women would sing bawdy and sexually explicit songs in Hindi, while the "women portraying men" would give demonstrations of the male role in the sexual act, often using objects such as aubergines^{vii} to imitate a phallus (Manuel 1998, 22). The (male) *tassa* drummers would stand at a distance, providing the rhythms for these songs and dances, though they were not supposed to see or overhear the women. This expression of women's open sexuality, rowdiness and explicit dancing was appropriate because it happened in a bound, private, women's only space, sanctioned by ritual. As Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen states, matikor was "one of those spaces that was probably fought for centuries by Indian women to collectively express their sexuality within Hinduism, which is generally a male-dominant religion and culture" (1999, 195). Similar to Carnival, matikor is a ritual outlet, the transgression of boundaries made acceptable because it is circumscribed by tradition.

Matikor is performed widely in the present day at Hindu weddings of all classes. It represents the most vibrantly alive of the folk dances—it has survived and retained its relevance, and is practiced often whereas the others are not. The traditional role of the Indian woman is as a transmitter of culture, writes Aparna Rayaprol (1997), and this role

is especially pertinent in circumstances of immigration (23). This is “memory work”—women are responsible for giving memories of the homeland a “concrete shape in the form of festivals, ethnic food, dress, and religious and language classes” (64). Because Indian women acted as torchbearers of tradition, the matikor ceremony was kept alive within their practices. Further, the traditional songs and dances of matikor have given rise to a new form of Indo-Trinidadian popular music and dance called chutney.

During my fieldwork, I saw elements of the matikor ceremony appear in public performance on a few occasions. A popular chutney song in early 2006 was called “Matikoor Night,” sung by Rasika Dindial. Dindial performed the song at an event called Chutney Soca Monarch, and was accompanied by dancers who entered the stage clutching yams and eggplants, and dancing around to simulate the ceremony to a crowd of ten thousand people. In an earlier performance to a recording of “Matikoor Night,” Clico Shiv Shakti featured a dancer dressed as an old Indian woman, complete with gray hair, head shawl and spectacles, dancing humorously, in a sexually suggestive manner. (This performance, incidentally, was for an overwhelmingly Afro-Trinidadian audience at an event called Ladies’ Night Out). This type of performance of matikor on a public stage, to humorous effect, represents a parody of the dance; that matikor can be referenced in this way, and that people (even Afro-Trinidadian people) recognize the imagery of the dance, shows that it is understood by Trinidadians as part of a communally shared experience.

Matikor reflects women’s assertion of their independent sexuality and resistance to control. The earliest, and longest-surviving folk dance, provides the lens through which subsequent women’s performances are understood. Other dance genres are an extrapolation of this first experience, informed by influences of modernity and cultural mixing, but retaining the root of women’s self-determination.

Despite the influences of matikor and other folk traditions as the beginning of Indian dance traditions in Trinidad, other types of dance have eclipsed the popularity of folk narratives. Susan Badree of Clico Shiv Shakti tells me, “People still perform [folk dances], but for a normal performance, people want to see something contemporary, something more appealing. There is a time and a place for those dances.” As Badree states, people are more interested in what is perceived as contemporary, and indeed, the most widely practiced East Indian dances in Trinidad are those that have been made more accessible or palatable to westernized tastes. In Trinidad, the globalization of media and, especially, of Bollywood films has provided new ways of connecting to a modern India, and has opened up a new realm of public performance for women.

Film dance

Film in this case refers to dances taken from Hindi or “Bollywood” films, produced by India’s prolific film industry. Film, or “filmi” dance as it is sometimes called, is a mélange of styles, incorporating movements from classical dances, folk dances of different regions of India, and western moves, although a few films, such as *Devdas*, feature classical dance in its “pure” form, and I am told that many film stars have been trained classical dancers. Film music, similarly, incorporates a blending of various Indian

and foreign influences. Around the time of India's independence from Great Britain in 1947, film directors attempted to create a popular music of broad national appeal by mixing genres, thereby creating a "distinctly national, modern, popular music" with which all Indians could identify, reflecting the striving for a new, unified Indian national identity (Arnold, 1992, 128). In the present day, Bollywood song and dance reflect this history of mixing, as well as an increasing self-awareness of diasporic Indian populations, producing films set in London or New York.

While it is perhaps inaccurate to generalize such a prolific industry—seven hundred to eight hundred films are produced per year (Booth 1995, 170)—it can be said that most Bollywood films are musicals, with each film containing several song and dance scenes. These song and dance sequences are often spectacular, a single song involving several costume and scene changes. Although Bollywood films are often criticized as being "too westernized," direct connections can be found to the large body of epic stories that exist in Indian folklore, such as the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* (Booth 1995, 172). The importation of these films has been crucial to the development of East Indian dance in Trinidad as it exists today: nearly every dancer I met credits Indian films for his or her first exposure to Indian dance, even those who have gone on to study classical dances in India.

The first Indian film to arrive in Trinidad was called *Bala Jobhan*, introduced in 1935 by an engineer named Ramjit Kumar. By this time, the majority of the Indian population in Trinidad would have been second- and third-generation Trinidadians, and the films represented an India that many had never seen:

With the advent of Indian films, the epic grandeur of an India left behind was now being transmitted into the new land of their adoption. They saw India in the landscape, the clothing, the practices of religion which were transmitted on the screen, the fictional characters who lived out the morals which their priests preached they should replicate in their own lives. It gave greater credence to their own practices, when a wedding ceremony carried out on the screen mirrored what the pundits and imams in their own society were doing (Mohammed 1998, 404–405).

Indian films in Trinidad were responsible for a cultural rejuvenation in general, not only conveying myths and symbols, but also serving to transmit gender ideology. Patricia Mohammed writes as follows:

The actions of both male and female protagonists are interpreted by the audience as the moral point of film, and invariably replay the major themes of mythology, goodness over evil, and the trials and tribulations which a woman must endure to live a virtuous life and preserve her husband's honour (1998, 405).

Urvashi Butalia (1984) has noted that female characters in Bollywood films are often simplified and stereotyped into either “good” or “bad” roles. The “good” ones are “(self-sacrificing) mothers, (dutiful) daughters, (loyal) sisters or (obedient and respectful) wives”—keepers of tradition who support their menfolk (109). The so-called “bad” women are often portrayed as “modern,” widowed or single, “westernized (synonymous with being fast and ‘loose’), independent (a male preserve), aggressive (a male quality) and they may even smoke and drink” (109). While these films transmitted images of traditional Indian gender ideology to Trinidad, they also paved the way for changes in standards of gender-appropriate behavior, particularly concerning Indian women and public performance.

About a decade after the first Indian films appeared in Trinidad, a woman named Champa Devi became the first Indo-Trinidadian to gain renown as a dancer on the public scene.^{viii} Beginning dance at age 15, she first became famous in Suriname and Guyana before returning to Trinidad to perform as the star of a stage production called *Gulshan Bahar* in 1943. This was the first stage production to attract the then-upper class Indians (*Natrang* 1992, 11), and it used a type of Indo-Trinidadian popular music called *Naya Zamana*, which was an adaptation of Indian film music (10). Champa Devi was largely self-taught, her dances inspired by Indian films. Sujata, an older Indo-Trinidadian woman and former classical dance teacher, tells me about the climate for women dancing at the time of Champa Devi’s emergence:

As a young child, my mother would be angry when I went to dance, young girls were not allowed to go to dance, it is not considered cultural. We were supposed to remain in the home and not really be in the front lines. There were a few dancers, like Champa Devi, she did filmi dances at weddings and so on, but parents didn’t want their children to imitate her. Parents didn’t allow their children to dance until the early ’70s. But it really wasn’t all that bad, because nowadays chutney is worse than that. Chutney has taken on a Carnival mentality (personal communication, April 17, 2006).

Dance in the Indo-Trinidadian community begins by being “not considered cultural,” and becomes an appropriate “cultural” activity in the span of a few decades. Rajsesh Seenath, a classically trained *Kuchipudi* dancer discusses the nature of the barrier Champa Devi crossed:

To break the ice at that time it would not be a timid person to do that. You’d have to be a really brave person and at those times when you’re doing shows, remember you have to go in the night and go out with a band which is consist of men. You understand, so in those days it was very restricted for women to not go out in those sort of company. So I know it was probably very hard for Champa Devi to break that ice so we could have an arena today. (personal communication, April 22, 2006).

Seenath stresses that Champa Devi would be going out at night with a group of men, an activity which was taboo for women at the time. Despite Champa Devi's crossing of gendered boundaries, she still became, as Seenath tells me, "very popular." In 1945, for instance, she performed in Skinner Park, San Fernando, Trinidad, to an audience of 20,000 people for the Indian Centenary celebration (*Natrang* 1992, 11). Her stage career lasted throughout the 1950s, and she began teaching dance in the 1960s.

The importation of Bollywood films prompted a cultural rejuvenation amongst the Indo-Trinidadian community, and provided a new source of ideas and imagery about what constitutes appropriate behavior for "virtuous" women. Rhoda Reddock (2004) shows that the importation of Bollywood films into Trinidad and the parallel emergence of East Indian radio and television contribute to an "alternative cultural space" (210) for Indo-Trinidadians, and that these media can play "a significant role in informing a sense of gender and gender identities, particularly through the display of sexual and gendered images" (190). Because these well-respected media showed women singing and dancing in public, the standards around Indo-Trinidadian women's purity began to relax, and Champa Devi was able to gain acceptance and even fame performing dances outside of private, women-only spaces. The appearance of Champa Devi and other early dancers on the public scene planted the seeds of acceptance for future generations of dancers, in film dance and other genres.

Since 1935, there has been a steady flow of Indian films into Trinidad. Today in Trinidad, newly released Indian films are shown in the major movie theaters, although they are outnumbered by Western (usually American) pictures. Jubilee Theatre in Chaguanas plays mostly Indian films. In addition to theater showings, Trinidad has a robust bootleg DVD industry, ranging from street vendors to sophisticated businesses complete with credit card swiping machines. Every DVD shop has a section featuring Indian pictures. These films usually sell for TT\$10 (less than US\$2), and I am told that they are usually obtained by (illegal) Internet downloads. Trinidadian daily newspapers occasionally feature celebrity gossip about Indian film stars, alongside the latest escapades of American stars. Radio stations such as 103FM, Masala 90.5 and Sangeet 106FM play film songs. In December 2005, the Bollywood Music Awards^{ix} were held in Trinidad for the first time, providing a meeting space for Asia-born and Trinidad-born Indians.

Bollywood films are a way for Indo-Trinidadians to connect to modern India. However, despite their popularity, they are a contested presence within the dance community. Susan Badree, of Clico Shiv Shakti, once told me:

Well, yes, we like to see what is happening over there, we like to see how far they reach. When we see the movies we know what they are all about, we see their culture and what they are doing. But here is not there (personal communication, January 26, 2006).

Badree's positioning is one of distancing, of recognizing relatedness with India but planting herself in Trinidad. Although Clico Shiv Shakti performs to film music, Badree tells me that the group bases its dances on the song's lyrics, rather than on an adaptation

of the plot of the film. Clico Shiv Shakti^x is the most famous East Indian dance group in Trinidad, and performs dances to film songs and Trinidadian popular music, at a wide variety of events. The Shiv Shakti dancers are a performing company^{xi} of about 40 young Indo-Trinidadian women, many of whom are trained classical dancers. The group's popularity can be attributed to its ability to navigate plurality with ease—incorporating elements of film, classical and Trinidadian popular culture into performances which are energetic and highly entertaining.

Despite the popularity of Indian film dances, they are often criticized by classical dancers who have trained in India, especially because of their increasing “westernization.” Rajshesh Seenath, a male Kuchipudi dancer offered the following criticism:

I don't consider [film dance] to be Indian dance. It is really a watered-down American dance. There's nothing in a Bollywood film that a good dancer would want to go to learn. When I say good dancing, I mean a person who *knows* dance. These fly-by-night dancers would say, oh fine, that's a good dance. But people who know dance and know the art would not even think twice to look at that dance. I think the last good dance movie we had in Trinidad was *Devdas*. I mean, it's perfect. When last have we ever seen a dance like that again? Everything is with bikini, and wining, and vulgarity. So, it's senseless. And it's all about the money again (personal communication, April 22, 2006).

As Seenath mentions, the influence of westernization of the Bollywood industry alienates some dancers who are invested in the more “purely” Indian traditions of classical dance. Seenath's distaste reflects on a recent trend in Bollywood: increasingly, many films are made with a diasporic audience in mind, packaged to be more palatable to Western tastes. Seenath's reference to “wining” is interesting, since it is a local Trinidadian term, which would not be known in India. The use of this term to describe Western dancing in Indian films suggests that, to Seenath, the Afro-Trinidadian population represents what is “Western” in Trinidad, as opposed to the Indo-Trinidadian population which retains a non-Western identity. Despite Seenath's dislike of Bollywood dance, later in the interview he told me, “We are all film dancers at first.”

Nearly every Indian dancer I met, including those who continued to seek professional training in India, cited Indian films as their earliest teachers and inspiration. Lisa Bissoon, a Kathak dancer, tells me about learning from films:

In Trinidad, we had the official government station, TTT, Trinidad and Tobago Television. They would show a Hindi movie every Sunday after lunch at I think 12 or 12:30. And when I was like nine or ten my parents bought a video player. And my dad would go and get movies and of course mostly Indian movies. I would say, “Hey dad, bring one with plenty dancing, bring one with plenty songs.” And I would, you know, view it over and over, especially the songs. So I became known

for my choreography, actually, after a while. (personal communication, May 4, 2006).

Bissoon charts her development as a dancer and choreographer beginning with her copying Indian films without knowing the meaning of the words, to over time becoming interested in classical forms, to her applying for a scholarship to India, where she learned Hindi and studied *Bharat Natyam* and Kathak for five years. Susan Mohip, a classically trained dancer and the youngest person to win Mastana Bahar,^{xii} also began her study of dance as a young child, by watching and copying Indian film dance:

Going through the chutney world, and in the film world, I did a lot in Trinidad here, and I considered, that was dance in Trinidad. And I wanted to learn more. In film dance, I would see a classical move. I would see certain things that identified me with classical dance. So that's where I made my change in my personal career. I was able to train in Kathak, I was able to go through the discipline, which I had not been exposed to before, and I went through the sacrifices to become a full-fledged refined dancer (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

Among classical dancers who have trained extensively in India, Hindi films still inform what is considered authentic in Indian culture in Trinidad. For instance, at a practice at Sandra Sookdeo's *Odissi* studio, a class of teenage girls was rehearsing a folk dance in which a bride is being teased by her friends. There is a scene where they put on her wedding veil, which the girls kept getting wrong. Partly frustrated and partly teasing, Sookdeo said, "Go and watch an Indian movie and you'll see how to do it right!" In addition to classical dancers whose first exposure was through film dance, there are also dancers who perform film dances exclusively. Today in Trinidad, East Indian dance is so widespread, I have heard statements such as "there is a dancer for every family," or "every house has a car and every house has a dancer." Throughout Trinidad, there are countless amateur or "neighborhood" dance groups of young women whose inspiration is generally gathered from film dance.

I spent a great deal of time with a "neighborhood" film dance group called the Shiva Devi All Stars, led by Suzanne Nowbutt. There were about fifteen young women in the group, ranging from ages twelve to twenty-five, who lived in Tunapuna and the surrounding areas. The Shiva Devi All Stars practiced every Sunday afternoon at a Hindu center called the Tunapuna Hindu Mandir. Practices were a social event, with several mothers and younger siblings of the dancers staying to visit and watch. Practices would often start up to an hour late due to talking and teasing (I received several offers from the girls to find me "a nice Trini boyfriend"). Mothers of the dancers also helped sew costumes and organize performances. Practices were fluid and semi-disciplined: cell phone calls would interrupt practices, and the girls would take breaks to go to the Royal Castle next door for a soft drink or fried chicken. The group would perform dances choreographed to recorded film songs. Nowbutt asked a Hindi-speaking friend to help her translate song lyrics, and she would then choreograph dances based on the meaning of the lyrics. The Shiva Devi

All Stars performed at events such as Hindu weddings, Diwali or Phagwa celebrations, and competed in Mastana Bahar.

Songs from the films *Devdas*^{xiii} and *Bunty aur Babli*^{xiv} were among the most popular selections by the Shiva Devi All Stars, as they were for several other “neighborhood” dance groups I saw perform. These two films, as well as other recent Bollywood films, have qualities that make them accessible to westernized audiences, contributing to their popularity in Trinidad. In the Shiva Devi All Stars, sometimes the theme of a dance would be loosely interpreted from the context of the film from which the song was taken. For example, Nowbutt choreographed a dance to be performed at various Diwali^{xv} celebrations organized by neighborhood committees around Tunapuna—celebrations which also feature tassa drumming, performers singing Bollywood and religious songs, raffles, and the crowning of that neighborhood’s “Diwali queen.” The song was taken from a scene in *Bunty aur Babli* in which the male lead, Bunty, and a police officer are both drunk and flirting with the same woman. In the Shiva Devi All Stars dance, Nowbutt played the lead role of the tempting woman, and a guest male dancer chased her around the stage, pretending to be drunk, as she coquettishly evaded him. The girls were background dancers, and were very familiar with this song: even before learning the dance, several of them had memorized the lyrics in Hindi and could lip sync along with the music. Their costumes were a bright magenta with gold braid trim; a cropped, short-sleeved top and long, A-line skirts. It seems that the dancers’ favorite part of the event was getting ready backstage—fixing each others’ hair and makeup, tying on ankle bells, adjusting costumes, veils, and heavy gold jewelry.

The atmosphere at each Diwali event was one of fun and celebration, although, during the performance, the audience was sitting quietly and watching, possibly walking around, but never dancing. Although these young women were performing an overtly flirtatious dance in flashy costumes, the rigid boundary between the dancers and the audience circumscribed this dance within the realm of the “non-vulgar,” and therefore an “acceptable” activity for young Indo-Trinidadian women. That the audience was watching this performance in a non-interactive way meant the idea that these young women are desirable and sexy was kept somewhat inert, or at least contained.

Participation in these Bollywood dances is a means by which young women negotiate appropriate boundaries of Indo-Trinidadian womanhood. In a study on Indo-Trinidadian young women and agency in Northern Trinidad, Gabrielle Hosein (2004) has found that these young women are continually balancing the identities and practices “appropriate” to different contexts. Because the demands on contemporary Indo-Trinidadian womanhood are shifting and plural, young women must “navigate different ideals as well as negotiate the expectations of each” (539). It is clear that young women participating in neighborhood film dance groups exhibit this kind of navigation and negotiation. Because Bollywood films have a history of respect in Trinidad as a way of connecting to all things Indian, dancers assert their Indianness by participating in a “cultural” activity. But because these films have increasing themes of westernization and modern costuming, ideas, and settings, they are more palatable to Indo-Trinidadian audiences accustomed to Western films and culture. Young women can be glamorous, modern, and gain a bit of

personal fame in their neighborhood, all the while participating in an “appropriate” Indian cultural activity and asserting community belonging. That a Hindu center allows the Shiva Devi All Stars a space to practice is evidence of this sanctioned “appropriateness.” Elsewhere, Hosein (2003) has shown that young Indo-Trinidadian women relate more closely to female characters in Western films, and their perceived independence, than to the more subservient female characters in Indian films. Young women can participate in Bollywood dancing for a few hours a week, and then return to an outside life, full of any number of influences.

For the Shiva Devi All Stars, the weekly dance practices create a women-only space, a place for women to gather outside of the home setting, to network, gossip, laugh, and support each other. In some ways, this practice space echoes the *matikor* space, with older women teaching the younger ones, and themes of sexuality and relationships discussed through teasing and laughing. Males—occasional guest dancers and little brothers—enter this space sometimes, though their status is that of “guest” rather than “member.”

The dances created by the women, from their shared, women-only space, are intended for the public eye, and a considerable amount of agency is inherent in producing the shows—the women choreograph, design costumes, conduct research to interpret Hindi lyrics, and book their own shows. The women intend to be seen and recognized by their communities as experts on Indian songs and films, and as glamorous entertainers. It also creates a space in which women may comment on sexual themes without incurring disapproval. These performances can be read as self-assertion of belonging as both “modern” and “traditional” Indian women.

Whereas film dance exhibits a connection to modern India that has been “imported,” the development of another dance style, chutney, exhibits the modernization of folk dance and expresses the continuity of the indenture experience.

Chutney dance

Chutney is a form of popular music, and an accompanying dance style, that has developed in Trinidad from Indian rhythms and traditions.^{xvi} Chutney, named after the spicy condiment, began to appear on the public scene in the early 1960s; an artist named Sundar Popo gained great popularity singing “light, chutney-style Hindi-English ‘local’ song...and his renditions of women’s songs recollected from his childhood” (Manuel 1998, 26). Chutney is commonly perceived as rooted in *matikor*.^{xvii} As Susan Badree has told me, chutney is simply these old songs “spiced up” and made public (personal communication, January 26, 2006). The mid-1980s marked the beginning of chutney’s mass popularity in Trinidad, popularized largely through weekend chutney dance fetes (Manuel 1998, 26). Chutney is sung in a mix of Hindi and English, although lyrical complexity often takes a backseat to driving, danceable rhythms.

Chutney dance differs from film and classical dances in that it is a popular, rather than a theatrical, dance: it is non-rehearsed and performed in large crowds at chutney “fetes,” or parties. While chutney fetes sometimes include choreographed dances performed on

stage by dance groups such as Clico Shiv Shakti, chutney music is always accompanied by the dancing of the audience. The dance is basically a sensual gyration of the hips, with some focal hand movements; there is some contention as to whether chutney dancing is wining^{xviii}, the waist and hip gyrations considered the mainstay of Carnival dancing, or a separate entity. Susan Mohip describes chutney dance as a combination of many influences:

It takes different cultural rhythmic movements. Whichever dance, they might be not Indian. You might see a Latin move, a calypso move, then you would see an Indian move, and you might see a Spanish move. Sometimes you may see an African move. And so I cannot say that it's one hundred percent Indian dance. It sucks in everything (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

Chutney's development in the multi-cultural setting of Trinidad represents the negotiation of national and ethnic belongings and identities, reflecting degrees of creolization of Indian culture, as well as "Indian-ization" of popular culture. Since the 1980s, chutney music has become increasingly accepted in the Trinidadian mainstream, and chutney soca—a variation of chutney utilizing more electronic instruments—is more overtly hybridized with soca, the dance music of Carnival.

Along with the increasing popularity comes an increase in controversy, generally based around the behavior of women at chutney fetes. At these events, it is common to see women of all ages wearing "revealing, Western" clothing (such as short skirts and high heels), consuming alcohol, and dancing freely with men, in groups of other women, on the stage, or by themselves. Representations of chutney as having origins in the matikor ceremony colors performance spaces in terms of the gendered appropriateness of behavior:

Performance context is one of the main differences between *mathkor* and *chutney*. The differences lie in the categorization of female/male performance and private/public domains. *Mathkor* was a private, religious and unrecorded ceremony in which female performers dominated. As such, the performance of the *mathkor* ceremony seems to accord with the model in which women's musical activity belongs to the realm of the private, in contrast to that of men which belongs to the public domain. But women's involvement in the public performance of *chutney*...contributes to a blurring of the private/public boundary. (Ramnarine 1998, 13; her italics).

The fact that the private women's dances of the matikor ceremony cross the private/public boundary and involve participation of men and women together, has spurred chutney's condemnation by conservative Hindu groups. Further, the spontaneous nature of chutney as popular dance, the mass participation creating a performance with fluid boundaries, and the drinking involved, create a performance space in which "no boundaries" and "lack of control" are main themes.

At a chutney show I attended at a venue called D Triangle, in Aranguez, Trinidad, performances of chutney songs by singers and bands were interspersed with “wining contests,” in which members of the audience were invited onto the stage to compete. There were as many as twelve audience members on the stage at any given time, wining energetically, dashing between the dancing on the stage and groups of friends in the audience. This event exemplifies chutney dance’s values of mass participation and blurring of boundaries between the audience and the performance space.

Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen (1999) views chutney as a positive development in terms of the “growing emancipation” of Indian women in Trinidad (196). Women dancing chutney represents “the loss of control by the individual Hindu male and the male-dominant Hindu community over the sexuality of the Hindu woman” (196) and points to the independence which Hindu women have achieved:

through their dancing in public in the Chutney festivals, they state emphatically that “my body and sexuality belong to me, and, nobody (not my man, father, brother, son, or the larger community) has the power to prevent my expression through dance” (197).

Chutney is often considered a lower class phenomenon. The censorship of chutney often comes from the upper and middle classes, “who see themselves as the preservers of so-called authentic Hindu culture” (197). Baksh-Soodeen believes that “it is always the lower classes which lead the struggle for meaningful social change” (197), and chutney is “clearly a movement by lower class Hindu women against male control” (198).

Chutney dance, as a popular, yet contested, genre in Trinidad exhibits a self-awareness of syncretism, plural identities, and diasporic identity. Unlike film and classical dance, which are versions of India imported after the Indian population was settled in Trinidad, chutney’s roots in the matikor ceremony (and/or other folk traditions) are from their earliest Trinidadian ancestors, and represent an India “remembered,” rather than an India “imported.” For Indo-Trinidadian people, chutney simultaneously acknowledges where they came from and where they are now, and the continuity of these experiences. Women’s participation in chutney dance is an assertion of their role in incubating the matikor tradition, and their decision to perform chutney outside of a ritualized context reflects their increasing self-determination as creators of Trinidadian popular culture. Through chutney dancing, Indo-Trinidadian women assert greater independence through *transgression*—of the public/private boundary, of the separation between men’s and women’s roles and spaces. The theme of “lack of control” in the music and dance style echoes the “lack of control” that men have over women’s bodies as they are dancing chutney.

Classical dance

Classical dance in India has a complex history spanning thousands of years. There are several types of classical dance—including Bharat Natyam, Kathak, Odissi, Kuchipudi, *Chaau*, *Kathakali*, among others—born of different regions in India.. Each has its own system of costuming, makeup, music, themes, as well as movement styles—the history

and intricacy of classical dance are too vast to summarize here.^{xix} However, a few points can be made: as a rule, classical dances are highly developed lexicons of movement that take several years of training to master. Classical dances have roots in a region's folk dances, but have been standardized into bounded systems of movement able to transcend regional specificity. Hand gestures feature prominently in classical dance, creating a sign language of sorts, through which dancers interpret song lyrics. Most classical dance disciplines maintain that through skillful combinations of movement, song, costume, and the sentiments or emotions displayed by dancers, a classical performance is able to convey a message to the audience that is more powerful than other mediums, such as reading a similar message in a text. In the Odissi discipline, this ability is called *abhinaya*.

The communicative abilities of classical dance are believed to be spiritual in nature. As Susan Mohip tells me, "You have to be spiritually minded to dance Indian dance, classical dance. [Dancing] is basically worship. You connect to God" (personal communication, April 24, 2006). Classical dances are rooted in Hindu traditions, and have overt religious connections—religious stories are portrayed through dances, and it is said that Lord Shiva, often depicted in a dancing pose, dances out the creation of the universe, his rhythms ordering the rhythms of the world (Hanna 1998, 199). Throughout Indian history (varying with geographical location and historical era), Hindu temples have housed virginal young female dancers, *devadasis*, whose occupation was to serve the gods through dance. Hanna notes that these ritual temple dances sometimes had sexual themes, as "women's dance movement emphasizes the beauty of the body and the erotic appeal of dance for an 'other'—god, husband, lover—in all its demanding exactitude" (Hanna 1998, 211). Because of a poor understanding of classical dance traditions, the British colonizing presence in India discouraged female dancing, mistakenly linking it to prostitution: "...a common strand of Hinduism, wherein sexual ecstasy is a path to spirituality, was an anathema to the British, who were in thrall to the Christian denial of the flesh" (213). A rejuvenation of classical dance occurred in the 1930s, however, as it was chosen as a symbol of a (noble, ancient) Indian cultural identity during India's fight for independence from Britain, and classical dance began to be taught to non-*devadasi* girls (214). This renaissance would have occurred after the last Indo-Trinidadians arrived in Trinidad in 1917—these early indentured peoples would have had little to no familiarity with classical dances, which arrived in Trinidad later, after some important changes took place.

Trinidad and Tobago gained independence from Britain in 1962, becoming a sovereign nation. As Mohammed (1988) has noted, new economic developments in the 1960s and 1970s led to the expansion of a cash economy (391), causing subsequent social and cultural shifts. She noted as follows that these developments:

which made available jobs in the various sectors—commercial, petroleum, and other industrial and public—involved as well a greater geographical shifting and displacement in the Indian female population. Indian women began to enter the Public Service as well and mix with the Black men and women who predominated in the

public sector. Many Indian women joined the teaching profession—a profession in which they were encouraged as it was an extension of their nurturing role. Other Indian women who had had access to a university education began to move into other professions—the legal profession proving to be one of the most attractive. The main outcome of all this were the changes which began to occur in the traditional Indian family setting (391).

As Indo-Trinidadian women increasingly entered the workforce and mixed with Afro-Trinidadian culture, they gained more autonomy—as well as some heady contradictions in the construction of identity. Mohammed states that their acting outside the boundaries of the stereotype of the submissive woman caused uneasiness, especially among Indian men, who “have reacted to the growing confidence of Indian women in a confused and sometimes violent fashion,” especially toward those Indo-Trinidadian women “friendly with men outside their ethnic group” (395). This would signify a greater loss of control of Indian men over Indian women.

Nationhood and continued mixing with the Afro-Trinidadian population galvanized the search for Indo-Trinidadian identity. It is during this time of cultural shifts and changes in gender expectations that Indian classical dances began appearing in Trinidad^{xx}. Processes of globalization such as relative ease of air travel and more efficient communications systems, as well as the increased wealth of the nation, allowed for more cross-cultural exchanges. The governments of both India and Trinidad and Tobago sponsored cultural exchange programs, bringing Indian dancers and musicians to Trinidad to teach, and sending Indo-Trinidadian dancers and musicians to India to study the classical arts. In the 1970s, the first Indo-Trinidadian dancer to travel to India was a man named Rajkumar Krishna Persad, who studied Bharat Natyam and returned to Trinidad to open the Trinidad School of Indian Dance. The first Indian dancers to travel to Trinidad were Pritap and Priya Persad, in 1977, through a combined effort from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the (Trinidadian) National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC), which led to the introduction of the Kathak and Odissi styles to Trinidad. Another Trinidadian named Satnarine Balkrarsingh studied in India, returning to Trinidad with his India-born wife, Mondira; together they started a classical dance school called the Nritanjali Theatre. Classical dance styles continued to gain ground, and indeed, were immediately “reputable.” As Sandra Sookdeo (1994) has noted, “Girls of ‘good character’ from respectable homes were then learning dance” (18).

Today, several types of classical dances are taught in Trinidad, typically by Indo-Trinidadians who have studied in India, on a government scholarship, for a period of a few years. Currently, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Bharat Natyam, and Odissi are disciplines being taught in various locations around Trinidad. Despite its growing popularity, classical dance reaches a smaller audience than more popular forms such as chutney or film dances. However, students of classical dance exhibit high levels of dedication and often spend several years studying with the same teacher, perfecting their skills.

Sandra Sookdeo’s Odissi^{xxi} studio in Cunupia, Trinidad, is a large, open-air building constructed behind her family’s house especially for dance instruction. Chalkboards line

the back wall, with the current week's scripture passages and prayers; the front has a stage with drums, and pictures of Hindu deities hang around the room. For Sookdeo, who trained in Odissi for several years in India, a typical Saturday begins in the early morning with study of Hindi and Sanskrit, in order to better interpret ancient dance texts. Later in the morning, a class of small girls, about ages four to six, would begin, dressed in white, for purity, and orange, for holiness. During this class, several parents stay to observe, and older girls from the next class come early to help teach and to watch. Each class begins with an invocation, and proceeds to *batu*, or "pure steps"—practice of the technique of movements without imparting a message. Sookdeo instructs classes sitting on the stage, playing a drum and chanting to accompany the dancing. Later in the class, choreographed dance pieces are practiced. Classes last through the day, progressing in terms of age and ability. Sookdeo has eighty to a hundred students in total, all girls and young women. The mood during these classes is festive—it is obvious the girls enjoy dancing and spending time with each other, although classes are run with a specific protocol and high expectations. Dancers are expected to be serious students of the discipline, pay attention during class, rehearse at home during the week, and also succeed in their schoolwork outside of Odissi class (one older student has just started medical school, and several others are pursuing college degrees). Older classes are given a lesson on dance theory before each practice begins, and the students discuss how to best create moods and feelings through dance—a complex study. Sookdeo encourages students to study Hindu scriptures to understand what types of situations conjure up specific moods—to add more spiritual depth to their dance practice.

Stories about the immortal love and romantic encounters of Radha and Krishna are central to the Odissi discipline, and the conveyance of "mood" or "feeling" helps make telling sexually themed stories "appropriate." As Sookdeo has told me, the older classes can learn to dance the "great love stories," as they will understand how to portray these scenes with sensitivity: "If you are not careful, it can become pornography. If you don't feel it, you won't be able to show it. There is a scene where a man is taking off a woman's blouse, and it can be misconstrued if the right feelings are not present" (Sookdeo, personal communication, January 14, 2006). Having the "right feelings" present requires much practice—a mastery and a subtlety of movement, along with the ability to communicate nuanced feelings. Sexually themed stories are also made "appropriate" because they are filtered through the language of the hands—hand movements allow a sexual story to become a metaphor, making communication of sexual themes more distant and theoretical. Classical dances are usually performed on a stage, with audiences being expected to sit quietly and watch. Rajsesh Seenath describes a proper venue for a classical dance performance as follows:

Anything that is very nice, no alcohol, no moving around. No eating, no drinking. If it is a wedding, there will be a part where there is nothing going on, just the dance. Just to watch the dance. If you can't sit and watch my dance, my students dance, then it's no use dancing. When it is very quiet, my students will dance (personal communication, April 22, 2006).

This is demand for a specific kind of respect of an ancient art form and a dancer's many years of study: an audience should be at attention, all wits necessary to appreciate levels of complexity within a dance. With this kind of respect demanded, and received, from audiences, it is clear why classical dance is perceived as a virtuous activity for young women. Lisa Bissoon tells me that classical dance is an alternative to other types of dance:

Parents don't want to see their daughters, or girls who remind them of their daughters, onstage, wining, doing something vulgar. Parents are pulling back and reflecting, and they now want their daughter to learn something different. So they call up a classical dancer and say, "I want my daughter to learn from you now." After film dance for many years, there is more classical dancing now (personal communication, May 6, 2006).

Classical dancers are often dismissive or even disdainful of other types of dance, seeing their disciplines as more highly developed and tasteful. A common theme in this argument is that classical dance is a "science," and indeed, other types of dance cannot rival the classical schools in terms of complexity and organization of information. The term "vulgar" is often used to describe film dance, chutney dance, or wining, and it seems that the issue of what is vulgar and what is not vulgar hinges around ideas of subtlety, control/mastery of skills, and maintenance of boundaries between performance and audience—what is "vulgar" is "out of control."

Chutney performances are often criticized by classical dancers as void of meaning; in classical dance, meaning is produced through a mastery of subtle movements, and chutney dance is anything but subtle. During a dance practice at the Odissi studio, Sookdeo asked an older class, "What message is found in chutney?" One student answered, "Wildness!" Another replied, "Drunkenness. It is for a man to see your body." Sookdeo concluded, "It's vulgarity. Women dance to entertain the menfolk, and the men are drunk and want only the physical body."

The Odissi students communicated a disdain for chutney dance (at least in front of parents and adults), although a few girls told me they like Clico Shiv Shakti. The girls from the Shiva Devi All Stars, however, enjoyed chutney, telling me where to go to see the best shows. Their standards depart from conservative values and are more open to creolization, although even more conservative Hindu groups who eschew chutney dance support and encourage young women's involvement in classical dance, and even film dance performances. These elements of planning, control, and boundaries make classical or film dances seem less "volatile" than chutney, even though they provide emancipating experiences for women and may contain dances on sexual themes.

Indian classical dance in Trinidad is an assertion of a certain Indian identity. As processes of creolization of Indian culture progress in Trinidad, the return to an ancient Indian cultural practice is a way to reaffirm cultural roots that have ancient, noble, and more-or-less unchanging history. Because classical dances are uniform lexicons of movement, and

essentially practiced the same way in Trinidad as in India, a certain version of “authenticity” is implied—one that necessitates an “insider” knowledge of ancient culture as practiced in modern India, and a separation from Trinidadian mainstream culture. Sookdeo once told me, “Some people say that Trinidad is the culture of calypso, pan, and chutney. But it is not. That is not our culture.” This ideology of separation is not necessarily full-time, however. Teachers and students, leaving the classical dance context, assert Trinidadian belonging in other areas of their lives, and thus participation in classical dance is part of the ongoing negotiation of plural identities. Despite notions of being “authentically” East Indian, creolized notions of gender roles have nevertheless shaped classical dance, and how choices are made to display ethnicity. This is apparent in the absence of men. In India, classical dance has historically involved men in a variety of roles. Trinidad’s dance community is nearly all women, with a few standout teachers. Rajsesh Seenath tells me that it is the stigma of “being gay” if they are dancing that keeps men from this activity (personal communication, April 22, 2006). Seenath, a male Kuchipudi dancer, boasts the highest rate of involvement of male dancers at his studio, due to Kuchipudi’s style as “vigorous and masculine”; he also creates roles for them as powerful male Hindu figures such as Shiva or Krishna. Classical dance movements are often separated into *tandava*, the masculine—movements that are “virile,” “strong,” and “forceful”; and *lasya*, the feminine, with movements that are “soft,” “graceful,” and with “restricted movements” (Sookdeo 1994: 34). While these stereotypes seem in keeping with Western gender ideologies, there is a crucial difference: in classical dance in India, a man dancing in the *tandava* style enhances or highlights his masculinity, whereas in Trinidad, to dance at all, aside from wining or chutney dancing, can be emasculating.

Indo-Trinidadian men and women react around different sets of social pressures. As Mohammed (2002) has described, a system of “competing patriarchies” leaves Indo-Trinidadian men vying for dominance, usually on creolized or westernized terms. Male Indo-Trinidadian dancers are by no means shunned or excommunicated, but it is not necessarily the most admirable or popular thing a young man can do. While there is an ancient tradition of men doing theatrical dance in India, the western world does not have a similar theatrical dance tradition known for bolstering masculinity. In other words, the tradition of masculine theatrical dance does not translate, and Indo-Trinidadian men must negotiate positions of power within new frameworks: men negotiate by not participating. Instead, involvement in other Indian “cultural” activities, such as *tassa* drumming, asserts an Indian cultural identity within the framework of creolized standards of masculine behavior—drumming translates as “masculine.”

Indo-Trinidadian women react to increasing creolization as well. In the 1970s, women began working more outside the home and participating in mainstream culture—becoming more “modern”—and it is no coincidence that classical dances became popular during this time. Women’s role as bearers of tradition and keepers of “purity” was put under pressure, in terms of societal expectations, as well as constructions of group and individual identity. As women became more “modern”—they sought increasingly (or parents sought for their children), to participate in an “ancient” Indian activity, possibly to counterbalance these societal changes.

Classical dance did not act as a backlash, however, *against* women's new-found "modernity". Instead, it allowed women to make new kinds of independent choices. Through classical dance, women created for themselves activities and women's gathering places outside of the home. For some extra-dedicated women, the study of dance allowed them to travel unaccompanied to India, to study, dance, and learn a new language. Several women are self-employed as dance teachers. Sandra Sookdeo, for instance, has acquired two languages (Hindi and Sanskrit) in her study of dance, and has written and published a book on the subject (see Sookdeo 1994). Her dance studio is used as a meeting space for the local Hindu community, as a place to perform ceremonies. Owing to her mastery of classical dance, she has become a respected leader in her community. Lisa Bissoon spent five years, unaccompanied, in India, choosing teachers with whom to study. She returned to Trinidad, regarded as an expert on Indian culture. Other dancers have had similar experiences, and the process will surely continue, as young women become increasingly interested in the study of classical dance.

Shiva, the Hindu "lord of the dance," is described: "His face emanates masterly discipline, while his body depicts wild ecstasy which represents the duality of the universe" (Sookdeo 1994, 46). A founding idea in Indian classical dance is that "wild ecstasy" may be experienced through processes of discipline, practice, and control. This theme resonates for Indo-Trinidadian women in classical dance: through the discipline and controlled movements which help to sanction classical dance, certain kinds of freedoms can be negotiated. Because of the separation of performance space, and the rigidity with which the audience must respect a performance, women are dancing not for purposes of men's enjoyment, but to display their craft—women perform classical dance as a self-actualizing activity. These negotiations for independence are sanctioned and encouraged, even within male-dominated orthodox Hindu communities. Although it negotiates greater independence for women, and exhibits an ownership of sexual themes, classical dance is able to sidestep the controversy that surrounds chutney—whereas women's dancing chutney negotiates spaces of independence through transgression of boundaries, women's performing classical dance negotiates independence through a commanded respect of mastery.

Conclusions

By dancing, Indo-Trinidadian women insist on being seen. Using their physical bodies as a medium, women express their history in Trinidad and the complexities of the ongoing construction of identity. The act of performing is a political one—women have insisted on creating performance spaces that they own, in which themes of gender and sexuality are hashed out. Indo-Trinidadian women's dances continue to command respect and attention, whether through navigation of plurality, transgression of boundaries, or mastery of classical forms.

Acknowledgements

This fieldwork was made possible by a Fulbright Research Fellowship. I would like to thank the Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, for acting as my home base during my time in Trinidad. Special thanks to Sandra Sookdeo, Michael Salickram, Rennie Mohammed, Suzanne Nowbutt, Ann Marie Nowbutt, Rajsesh Seenath, Lisa Bissoon, and Suzanne Mohip, for their kindness, and to all the other dancers who shared their art with me.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The island of Tobago has a population of about 50,000 that is almost completely of African origin. Trinidad is home to (nearly) the entire East Indian population, and all fieldwork was carried out there. The terms Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian will be used herein to describe Trinidad's two major ethnic groups.

ⁱⁱ "Creole" is a term used in Trinidad to describe an Afro-Trinidadian person, or something related to Afro-Trinidadian culture. Somewhat confusingly, the term "French Creole" describes a Trinidad-born Caucasian person. "Douglarization" is a Trinidadian term for the mixing of East Indian and African people or ideas, and is sometimes used interchangeably with "creolization." In Trinidad parlance, a "douglar" is a person of mixed East Indian and African heritage.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carnival is often considered to be an Afro-Trinidadian invention, and indeed, many of the traditions were born of their unique experience. Indian people in Trinidad, however, have contributed to Carnival traditions—not only as masquerade participants, but also as composers of steel pan music, calypsonians, and creators of *mas* characters (Sankeralli 1998).

^{iv} Carnival is a two-day celebration, taking place on the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday in the Christian calendar (although "Carnival season" begins the day after Christmas). The music of Carnival is *soca*, which is fast, energetic, and danceable. During Carnival Monday and Tuesday, Port-of-Spain and several other cities have celebrations in which costumed masqueraders move through the streets in a slow processional, dancing and drinking.

^v In addition to the "remembered" dances brought by the earliest indentured East Indians, folk dances from other regions in India are performed in Trinidad today—these have been imported recently by dance teachers who have studied in India or by visiting East Indian teachers. Some folk dances have been more institutionalized than others, developing a more solidified lexicon of movements, in order to be transportable to other places. At Sandra Sookdeo's dance studio, for example, students learn folk dances from areas such as Punjab and Maharashtra. For the purposes of this study, however, I am most interested in folk dances as elements of retained or remembered culture and their place in contemporary constructions of Indo-Trinidadian identity; these recently acquired folk dances occupy much the same role as do recently acquired classical dances.

^{vi} Alternate spellings include *math kor*, *matticore*, *matikoor*, etc.

^{vii} eggplants

^{viii} Peter Manuel (1998, 25) has recorded the existence of an earlier Indo-Trinidadian dancer named Alice Jan, who gained local fame as a dancer at weddings around the turn of the twentieth century. My informants were unfamiliar with Alice Jan, and were unable to comment on her influence. It is safe to say she was not as widely influential as Champa Devi.

^{ix} The Bollywood Music Awards are sponsored by the Bollywood Group, and are held around the world in places with large populations of East Indian people. This particular event was held in the Hasely Crawford Stadium in Port of Spain.

^x Clico is the name of a local insurance and investment company, the group's financial sponsor. Shiv Shakti, as the group is popularly known, asked me to use the full name in any publications.

^{xi} In addition to being a performing company, Clico Shiv Shakti also has schools in eight locations around Trinidad, for young women who want to learn this style of dance; up to 100 young women are studying at each school.

^{xii} Mastana Bahar is an annual competition in Trinidad showcasing local talent performing East-Indian-themed songs and dances.

^{xiii} *Devdas* (2002) is the latest, and most famous, of several film adaptations of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's (1917) novel of the same name. This version stars India's most famous male and female leads, Shahrukh Khan and Aishwarya Rai. As Rajsesh Seenath states, it is a more "Indian" Bollywood film, portraying "pure" classical dances, but it has crossover quality in terms of the style of the cinematography, and was the first Hindi film to be nominated for an Academy Award.

^{xiv} *Bunty aur Babli* (2005) is the story of two young bandits, Bunty and Babli, criss-crossing India on the run from the police. The storyline itself is a loose adaptation of the 1967 American film *Bonnie and Clyde*. Incidentally, the film is set in the northeastern state of Uttar Pradesh, where most of the indentured Indians in Trinidad came from. I was told by one bootleg DVD shop in Tunapuna that it is their best-selling Indian DVD by far.

^{xv} Diwali is a Hindu celebration that occurs in October or November each year. Although the roots of the holiday are sometimes disputed (it is celebrated by Sikhs, Jains, Hindus, and some Buddhists in India), it is generally interpreted as the “Festival of Light,” a celebration of the victory of good over evil. The Indo-Trinidadian Hindu community celebrates the holiday with neighborhood festivals, preparation of special meals and sweets, and the lighting of small clay lamps.

^{xvi} Chutney has also gained popularity among the East Indian populations of Guyana and Suriname.

^{xvii} Ramnarine (1998) has found that chutney is usually considered a reinterpretation of song and dance from the matikor ceremony (4), although Manuel (1998) cites chutney’s roots as a “revival and repackaging” of a variety of folk genres, not just the matikor songs (25).

^{xviii} According to Miller (1991), wining can be understood as an act of autosexuality, a momentary escape from sexual relationships as social exchanges—this is especially pertinent for women, for whom cross-gender and sexual relationships can be particularly oppressive.

^{xix} For a more thorough history of Indian classical dance in the Caribbean, as well as a discussion of classical dance theory, see Sookdeo (1994), and for a history of evolving gender roles in classical dance in India, see Hanna (1998).

^{xx} Because Indian classical dances stem from Hindu traditions, most participants in classical dance are Orthodox Hindu. Identity negotiation through classical dance generally does not apply to Muslim or Christian Indo-Trinidadians, who have other combinations of cultural obligation and means of creative expression with which negotiations are made.

^{xxi} Odissi hails from the state of Orissa in North-eastern India, and is inspired by a series of poses depicted by thousands of sculptures of dancers adorning temples throughout Orissa. Odissi dance was taught to *devadasis*, until the 16th century when political unrest in Orissa disrupted religious practices, and *devadasis* became mistresses to royalty, losing their esteem as temple dancers. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Odissi was taught to young boys, or *gotipuas*. During oppressive British rule in the nineteenth century, Odissi fell into neglect, although it has experienced a rejuvenation since the 1950s (Sookdeo 1994, 22–24).

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The University of
the West Indies
Centre for Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

Landscaping Englishness: Respectability and Returnees in Mandeville, Jamaica¹

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, the town of Mandeville has become a haven for returning residents² (henceforth returnees), particularly Jamaicans who migrated to England in the 1950s and 1960s and subsequently returned to Jamaica in the 1990s to retire (See Nettleford 1998). As Harry Goulbourne (1999, 164) observes, "...The hill town of Mandeville has acquired the reputation of being a desirous destination for returnees who create a prosperous ghetto characterised by some English pastimes: tea in the afternoon,

¹ A previous version of this article was published in Potter, Conway and Phillip's edited volume, *The Experience of Return: Caribbean Perspectives*. See Horst, Heather A. "Landscaping Englishness: The Postcolonial Predicaments of Returnees in Mandeville, Jamaica". In *The Experience of Return: Caribbean Perspectives*, edited by Rob Potter, Dennis Conway and Joan Phillips, 207–224. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005

² "Returning resident" is a government category for a person who leaves Jamaica for five years and claims the title for customs purposes upon moving back to the island. In this chapter, I use "returning residents", "returned migrants" and "returnees" interchangeably to refer to individuals who migrated to the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s and remained there up to the 1990s when they opted to retire in Jamaica, unless otherwise specified. Although exact numbers are difficult to determine due to the transient nature of "returning resident" status and the requirement of only one returnee per household to register with customs, 20,085 individuals enrolled for returning resident status between 1993 and 2003 (Planning Institute of Jamaica 2004). While only 250 individuals joined Mandeville's two Returning Resident Associations in the year 2000, estimates suggest that there are enough returning residents in Mandeville to create at least six active associations. Moreover, the 250 does not count spouses or the returning residents who did not wish to formally enlist in the association(s), but often participate in the group's organised activities (Personal Communication 2001).

the cultivation and display of well manicured lawns and gardens ordered for more aesthetic pleasure than practical use, which stand in sharp contrast to the utilitarian kitchen and fruit gardens of rural Jamaica. Some would see an irony here because the town of Mandeville in the parish of Manchester, like Simla in the Himalayan foothills, used to be the retreat for British Administrators in the colonial past during the hottest months.” Referring to returnees as “the English”, many Jamaicans and others attribute returnees’ choice to move to Mandeville as a deep internalization of English values and aesthetics as well as a sense of superiority over the “local” Jamaican population.

Introduction

While Mandeville has always been a choice retirement location for those Jamaicans and expatriates who could afford to purchase property in the town, it has not always been viewed as a sanctuary for returning residents. In fact, it was only with the relatively large remigration of individuals who lived in the United Kingdom (8,634 between 1993 and 2003) that the prominence of Mandeville increased, an association that Jamaicans and others presume reflects the town's unique British heritage as a hill station (Planning Institute of Jamaica 2004). In this paper, I consider how the idea of Mandeville as an "English place" resonates with *returnees'* sense of being an "English people". Recognising place as both a geographical location as well as a particular location within a social hierarchy, I interrogate the ways in which the "respectability" — a value which emerged in the transition from the plantation system to emancipation — accorded to Mandeville is intricately tied to the gendered experience of migration, return migration and landscapes. I begin by tracing the production of Mandeville as an English place, with particular attention to the ways in which respectability was honed through the cultivation of (English) family life, homes and landscapes. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Mandeville in 2000 and 2001³, I then turn to the experience of return migration, with particular attention to the gendered relationship between the attainment of respectability and returnees' sense of identity and belonging.

The English heritage of Mandeville

Located 628 metres above sea level on the Manchester plateau, Mandeville and its surrounds remained isolated until the English and Spanish contest⁴ over the island. H. P. Jacobs (1994) marks the Spanish arrival into the present boundaries of Manchester at Porus, located twelve kilometres from the centre of Mandeville, in 1656. Despite the early Spanish presence, Manchester remained relatively uninhabited until 1814 when the freehold landowners of the parishes of Vere, St. Elizabeth and Clarendon appealed to the House of Assembly for the creation of a new, centralised administrative centre. The measure (approved in Act 55 George III C 23) resulted in the establishment of Manchester, named after the governor of the island, the Duke of Manchester, Williams Montagu⁵ (Brathwaite 1971). The parish remains the youngest parish in Jamaica.

At its outset, Manchester comprised 250 landed proprietors, 750 free people of colour and 15,000 slaves (Sibley n.d.). Two years later Mandeville, named for Montagu's eldest son Lord Mandeville, was appointed the capital. In order to purchase land in Mandeville, the vestry (six vestrymen and two magistrates) determined that a man should hold British nationality and must own at least ten slaves or alternatively earn a salary of £160 per

³ Research was based upon ethnographic fieldwork in Mandeville in 2000 and 2001 which included (but was not confined to) participation in Returning Resident Association meetings and functions, living in a returning resident neighbourhood as well as in-depth interviews with twenty returnees concerning their return and the material culture of home.

⁴ Before the Spanish landed in Jamaica in 1494, the island was inhabited by Arawak Indians who arrived from South America between AD 600 and AD 900 (Sherlock and Bennett 1998).

⁵ Montagu was a governor of Jamaica between 1808 and 1827.

annum in 1819 (Grant 1946, 11). The next year the vestry raised the requirements to £200, or twenty slaves, a condition which continued to increase annually.

Once the capital was established, the vestry planned four buildings in the town: the courthouse, parsonage, gaol/workhouse and church. The courthouse, noted today as an historical monument, was completed in 1817. Ornamented with Doric columns and a double staircase, the Georgian-inspired courthouse was built by slaves out of limestone bricks. The courthouse still stands today as a symbol of the law and order established under British rule. Across the village green (now a park named after the long-standing mayor Cecil Charleton) stands St. Mark's Anglican Church⁶. The accompanying rectory, the first official house built in Mandeville, was rented out as a tavern by the first rector, the controversial Reverend George Wilson Bridges. In the mid-nineteenth century, a number of English troops living at the garrison in the town centre were buried in the parish churchyard after a yellow fever outbreak.

Unlike the rest of the island which was dominated by large sugar (and later banana) estates, the parish of Manchester became known for the presence of small coffee plantations established after the prohibitions were lifted on coffee importations to Britain (Hall 1959, Braithwaite 1971, Jacobs 1994, Higman 1995). The rocky limestone soil and the cooler climate enjoyed throughout Manchester set the environmental conditions for coffee to thrive in the Carpenter Mountains, the May Day Mountains and in the area north of Mile Gully. With its relatively more flexible labour system⁷, the emergence of coffee plantations resulted in two distinct features of colonial Manchester. In contrast to the predominance of owner absenteeism on sugar estates, two-thirds of the proprietors lived on or near their coffee plantations⁸. Shepherd (2002) attributes this pattern to the small size of the plantations as well as the expense of employing others to oversee the property, which made living abroad less feasible for the coffee proprietors who did not share the wealth, prestige or political influence of the absentee sugar estate owners who could afford to return to Europe. This residence pattern resulted in closer supervision of the slaves by the estate owners who married and brought their wives to the area. Although there are debates surrounding the extent to which Creole or African slaves rebelled more frequently (see Braithwaite 1971, Higman 1995), Jacobs (1994) suggests that coffee plantation proprietors encouraged marriage, European family patterns and participation in religious life. Catherine Hall (2002) has revealed that while frontiers and discovery remained colonial men's domain, the wives of plantation proprietors, missionaries and other white women played an important role in colonial Jamaica. While men took charge of the economic and political, white women were tasked with conveying the values of Englishness and whiteness. In particular, the cultivation of homes and of gardens by white women were viewed as moral "object lessons" which were designed to

⁶ Completed in 1820, one of the church's unique features is the lynch gate, "a roofed gate in the churchyard under which the bier traditionally rests during the initial part of a funeral" (Bowen 1986). It also possesses a gleaming cross, constructed out of local alumina.

⁷ Higman (1995, 26–27) suggests that "the organization of labour was less strictly regimented" and its division more flexible on the coffee estates; in Manchester human labour was often supplemented by livestock that were used to power the coffee mills due to the "very few streams and rivers present from which water power could be accessed" (Monteith 2002, p 12; Delle 1998).

⁸ For a comparison of sugar plantations, see Austin-Broos 1997 and Harrison 2001.

teach “order, civilization, Christianity, domesticity” (Hall 2002, 113) to the emergent creole class⁹. After emancipation in 1838, the large upheavals occurring across Jamaica between slaves and planters were relatively absent in Mandeville and Manchester¹⁰, and many of the freed slaves became independent farmers who grew coffee and other small crops. Jacobs further observes that in 1950 the parish of Manchester held the third lowest illegitimacy rate on the island, behind the Kingston-St. Andrew Metropolitan area and the parish of St. Ann (Jacobs 1994). In the following section, I turn to contemporary Mandeville and the ways in which male and female returnees grapple with the tensions between the English heritage of Mandeville and their own legacy of Englishness derived through the experience of living in England.

A respectable retirement

Currently over 161,000 people live in the parish of Manchester, with just under one-third of Manchester’s residents residing in greater Mandeville. Mandeville continues to maintain its reputation for civility, education and order. Alongside the more established schools such as Manchester High School, Bel-Air Academy serves the expatriate community as well as the children of the town’s wealthy elite. Bible colleges recruit young men and women to the area, as does Northern Caribbean University (NCU) which is the first university on the island located outside Kingston. Local Jamaican artists’ works appear in Bloomfield Great House, a renowned steakhouse and former coffee plantation, and there is an annual art fair sponsored by the Catholic Centre. The charity event and opening night dinner feature Mandeville’s most prominent citizens. Corresponding with this English heritage is a narrative of wealth and status. Mandeville possesses a large population of highly educated citizens, many of them individuals with foreign degrees and honours. It is also the wealthiest parish on the island because of the development and influence of the bauxite industry¹¹. As a result, the town offers a wide range of services, such as supermarkets, small grocers, pharmacies, hardware stores, florists, banks, insurance and investment services, as well as local and foreign fast food

⁹ In nineteenth century Nevis, Olwig (1993) reveals that “it became common to consecrate a new house, or a house which had been enlarged or rebuilt by holding a social gathering” by the Methodist church rather than through the common practice of celebrating a new house with a secular (African) celebration. (83).

¹⁰ There is some controversy over the extent to which the large-scale rebellions were experienced throughout Mandeville and Manchester. Hall (1959) argues that the Moravian churches of Manchester actually initiated what later became known as the Baptist Revival. While Hall presents the spread of the revival throughout the island as reasonable, he is perplexed by its Manchester origins. As Hall queries, “It is difficult to explain why the movement began where it did. Manchester contained no sugar estates. It was a relatively prosperous parish of small settlers. It is unlikely that the religious feeling arose as a reaction to any peculiar economic distress. In part, it may be described as a desire to break away from the rather hum-drum routine of daily labour. Social amenities and recreational facilities were limited. The chapel was usually the social centre. An intense emotional appeal by the local preacher might well sway a congregation, and the response, as well as the appeal, might prove infectious” (237).

¹¹ Bauxite strongly redefined the dynamics of life in Mandeville after WWII. The bauxite industry commenced in 1942 when Mr. R. F. Innis, the Jamaican Government Senior Agricultural Chemist, informed the government of the rich alumina content of the soil. Alcan Aluminium Ltd (Montreal) subsequently surveyed the soil on behalf of the Jamaican government. After the content of the soil was formally confirmed, Alcan carried out a second survey, shipping 2,500 tonnes of bauxite ore to North America in October of 1943. When the Jamaican government decided to commercially develop the land, Alcan started building a site at Kirkvine, just outside of Mandeville, in 1950 under the name of Jamaica Bauxite Limited, which was a fully owned subsidiary of Alumina Canada Limited. Windalco purchased the Kirkvine site (and corresponding site at Ewarton) from Alcan in 2007.

chains and numerous shopping malls. Many of these shops, supermarkets and groceries have taken advantage of the presence of the “new English” in Mandeville by importing lamb, British-style baked beans and special tea biscuits.

Throughout my research, I talked at varying lengths with one hundred returnees about their return and why they decided to move to Mandeville. For those returnees I interviewed in detail, three-quarters had lived in the greater London area for an average of 37 years, returning to Jamaica around 1996. This date reflects that returnees from the United Kingdom represented the largest single group of returnees between 1994 and 2001. Eighty per cent of the individuals I interviewed and talked with returned to Jamaica as married couples in their mid-60s, although the number of widows and widowers continues to increase with time. In our discussions, the English heritage of Mandeville remained evident to returnees, particularly in the town’s architecture and town planning. On the morning walks in Ingleside (“English side”), a local neighbourhood, returnees enjoy identifying the beauty of the large, modern homes alongside the vestiges of the English past, such as bricks and chimneys. Returning residents often remark upon the green hills of the surrounding countryside and delight in the fog of the winter mornings which remind them of their days in England. In fact, returnees’ interpretation of the landscape is not unlike the British troops who transformed the area into a hill station and summer retreat in the 1800s because it reminded many returnees of the green rolling hills of the English interior.

However, despite the seemingly self-evident association with Englishness, returnees described their decision, priorities and motivation to return to Jamaica quite differently. The first motivation involved the possibility of attaining an ideal retirement lifestyle. Most returnees felt they had spent their lives working hard and had earned the right to retire. Besides being familiar, Jamaica represented a place that, unlike England, was enjoyably warm year-round. Because many returnees endure arthritis, a condition complicated by the cold English climate, Jamaica also improved their health and ability to stay active. For example, the Thompsons represent a typical example of a couple who made decisions to relocate to Mandeville based upon lifestyle (Horst 2006). When they first started making preparations to return to Jamaica, the couple contemplated living in Hanover where Mrs Thompson’s family originated. In Hanover, they envisioned a life at the seaside, enjoying the ocean breeze, surrounded by extended family members. The couple also considered living in the hills of Kingston where they had easy access to shopping, cultural events and aspects of urban life they had become accustomed to in London. However, they disliked the need for extensive security systems and the traffic and pollution in Kingston itself. The Thompsons eventually decided upon Mandeville because it possessed cultural events, was only a short (two- to three-hour) drive from Kingston and had all of the modern conveniences such as health care, water and electricity, without the crime of Kingston. In addition, and after living so many years in England, they had become accustomed to its climate and found that Jamaica’s north coast and Kingston made their hands and feet swell, an uncomfortable physical side effect of the heat which could potentially restrict their ability to enjoy life in Jamaica.

Proximity to family and the parish of birth helped to determine where other returnees relocated. Thomas-Hope (1992) notes that in the 1950s and 1960s, the rural areas of Manchester experienced a significant rate of migration¹² and, not surprisingly, half of the individuals I interviewed at length were from the parish of Manchester, a pattern which Chevannes and Ricketts (1997) also observed in their study of returnees in Kingston and on Jamaica's north coast. In fact, individuals who lived in Manchester as children referred to Mandeville as "my town" and could tell childhood stories about visiting the large market or shopping over the Christmas season. Likewise, individuals relocated to areas where their family house or property remained, although many were unable to build on family land due to its inaccessibility and lack of facilities. Other returnees moved in or near their home parish and recreated a version of family land in Mandeville. For example, three siblings who returned from England built homes on individual plots adjacent to each other while their other two siblings moved five minutes away on adjacent streets. While the direct proximity between the siblings remained unusual, most returnees thought it ideal to live in the same town where they could easily visit their brothers, sisters, cousins, aunties and uncles.

Finally, returnees opted for Mandeville because they learned that there was a relatively large returning resident community. For example, Mr and Mrs Brown went back to their home parishes in eastern Jamaica only to discover that very few of their family or their friends were still living there. Mr Brown, who was more reluctant to return to Jamaica than his wife, worried that he would feel lonely and trapped in the parish of their birth. He also managed to convince his wife that Mandeville would be a better place to move to because they could make friends with other returnees who had shared their experience of living in England. In addition, two of their close friends moved to Mandeville as they were contemplating their return. The ease of attaining land and a building contract while living in London solidified the Browns' choice.

The decision to return to Mandeville appears to be based upon familiarity with place and people as well as the ability to obtain a particular lifestyle, a lifestyle of leisure which reflects an English-influenced desire to tend to home and garden in retirement (See King, et. al. 2000). Yet what remained noticeably absent from the discussions of returnees' relocation to Mandeville was the English factor popularly touted as an explanation for their choice by scholars and other Jamaicans. In fact, when I directly asked returnees if they moved back to Mandeville because it was so much like England (or alternatively described Mandeville's noted English qualities), returnees appeared quite puzzled by the association between a decision to return to Jamaica and the idea that they were moving back to some version of England¹³. Other returnees asserted that while, certainly, there were English aspects of Mandeville that remained, Mandeville simply was not England. Noting the dramatic changes in the town over the last thirty to forty years, returnees

¹² Peach (1968) notes that 11.2% of Jamaica's population migrated to the UK between 1956 and 1960.

¹³ This is not to suggest that returnees were not equally critical of Jamaica. Many returnees lamented about the crime and violence in Jamaica and the "indiscipline" of Jamaicans generally. Some returnees even suggested that Jamaica was better off when the "Queen mum ruled Jamaica". Their disappointment and the idea that they were moving back to live with other returnees could suggest that returnees wanted to return to a little England. However, they did not wish to live with the wider English population. They wanted to live with people who shared their experiences and perspectives.

contended that what remained were mere vestiges of English life captured in the chimneys and buildings of old Jamaica. While returnees generally held positive sentiments about Mandeville and their choice of Mandeville for their new home, they mentioned that Mandeville was not as “nice” or “cool” as it used to be because of the erection of concrete buildings, the reduction in trees, increased traffic and poor roads. At least half of the returnees I talked to claimed that the bauxite industry had not helped the situation and had caused environmental damage to the area which affected the water and air quality in the town. One-third of the returnees went so far as to say that Mandeville has become a “little America” with all the shopping malls and fast food chains — the once quaint country town destroyed by modern consumerism.

In addition to criticising the notion of English Mandeville, returnees consistently denied that Englishness played any role in their decision to return to the town. Many returnees were even offended by the suggestion that they were at all English. Furthermore, although they admitted to being somewhat amused in the beginning, returnees complained about how “locals” insisted upon calling them “English”; they thought it ridiculous that an English accent or drinking tea changed who they felt they were. But if Mandeville is not English and calling returnees “the English” causes offence, what does it mean to be an Englishman or an Englishwoman? In the following section, I trace how male and female returnees’ concept of Englishness has been transformed over the past 40 years, in order to discern how returnees view Englishness and, by extension, the importance of Mandeville’s English heritage today.

Shades of Englishness

When most returnees left for England, a white bias permeated Jamaican society, particularly within the aspirant classes. Henriques (1953) describes the valuation of individuals considered “fair”, a term associated with light skin colour, European features and straight hair (See Hoetink 1985). Jamaicans also utilised terms such as “good” (i.e. “European”) and “bad” (i.e. “African”) to describe the features and physical characteristics of an individual, particularly before the Black Power Movement gained momentum in Jamaica in 1968. As Chevannes (1995) delineates:

Ideologically speaking, to this day, hair in Jamaica is either *good* or *bad*. *Good* hair is described as *pretty*, not soft or fine, but *pretty*, or sometimes *nice and straight*. *Bad* hair is *nati-nati* (knotty). These ideologically laden terms are often used purely descriptively, and do not necessarily reflect the outlook of the user...The matter did not end at the level of values. Society produced for the grooming not of ‘bad’ hair but of ‘good’ hair. The purveyors of hair pomades and oils assumed that everybody either had or wanted to have ‘good’ hair, and the combs manufactured or imported into Jamaica were designed for grooming only ‘good’ hair (105–106, *author’s emphasis*)

Women’s internalization of this valuation of European images of beauty was made particularly evident through the painful process of straightening the hair with the application of hot oil, creams and use of a hot metal comb, as well as lightening the skin

with creams and face powders, in order to “lift up” themselves within society through the erasure of colour and texture on their skin and bodies. Henriques (1953) notes that fair women were particularly concerned with any permutations in their skin colour, such that women of fair complexion might avoid the sun for fear of darkening. This white bias extended to the practices involved in social reproduction, such as marriage and education, wherein many men sought fairer women for marriage. In addition, families with restricted budgets granted children of lighter colour greater access to education and other opportunities than their darker-skinned children. As Austin-Broos (1997, 150) argues, in Jamaica “culture, class and race do not merely coincide. They merge as phenotype is rendered through culture; inheritance made potent through environment and experienced inscriptions on the body.” To think of oneself as English was therefore one step closer to being white.

There is clear evidence of scepticism concerning the continued acceptance of colour discrimination and the valuation of whiteness, such as in the adult suffrage movement which fought to give black Jamaicans the right to vote and self-govern and movements led by Marcus Garvey, Claudius Henry and the Rastafarians in the first half of the twentieth century (Chevannes 1994, 1995). Yet, many returnees I spoke with admitted that when they travelled to the “Mother Country”, at some level they carried these positive views of whiteness (See Deakin 1970). Just the act of seeing white people who were poor, living on the streets and begging, jarred many returnees’ worldview when they first arrived in England. They never imagined that they would be sitting next to a white person while working in a factory. These images were not what returnees learned before venturing to England and were not in keeping with how they were taught to view the English.

Most returnees’ education about being English and the English way of life came through the work environment and on the street. Nurses (which comprised one-quarter of the people I interviewed) offered particularly poignant stories: for instance, a patient with a stab wound who was bleeding profusely, protested and refused treatment when he saw a black nurse coming to attend to him. The man almost died before the doctor told him that he had no choice but to receive treatment from her because a white nurse was unavailable. Even in nursing school when England was desperate for their services, female returnees reported being made to share the smallest boarding rooms, work the least desirable hours and carry out the dirtiest duties, such as bedpans. They endured verbal abuse not only from their fellow students but also from their supervisors who sometimes made jokes about how the black nurses needed to use Sno Mo, a bleaching detergent, to become clean enough to touch the patients. Even the high achievers and individuals from more privileged backgrounds acknowledged that they were often passed over for promotions. One returnee noted that she received the highest marks in her nursing class, an honour which normally accorded the student a prestigious award. The year that she won, the award was mysteriously cancelled.

Men characterised their early years in England as filled with tension and antagonism. A man living in one of the neighbourhoods I frequented sat down one evening and told all the neighbours about his life in England as “the fighter”. In the early years, he was dating

an English woman from a working-class English family. No one liked it. Her family did not like the fact he was black and his family thought that he was in for trouble trying to date a white woman, particularly if he had any intention of marrying her or starting a family. Even when they went out on the street, he was accosted by strangers who launched racial slurs at the couple and tried to coax his girlfriend into leaving him. One night he recalled dropping his girlfriend off at her door and being beaten by white youths as he made his way back to the bus stop, simply for the audacity of dating a white woman. He managed to give them “a few good licks” and ran home, but he also said that every time he went on the street as a young man in England, he took on the role of “the fighter”. As Winston James (1993) argues, what is most significant about the daily encounters with whites (particularly working-class whites) throughout the 1950s and 1960s was the ways in which these changed West Indians’ conceptions of colour and race, resulting in disillusionment with the esteem accorded to whites and with their conceptions of whiteness learned through socialisation in the Caribbean.

In the 1970s, returnees’ attention shifted to the plight of their children growing up and making their way through the British education system in an increasingly conservative climate (typified by Enoch Powell’s infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech in 1968). The growth of the conservative movement, which sought to restrict the development of the black population in the UK, was compounded by massive unemployment across the country. Gilroy (1987) argues that this environment fostered the growth of a new form of racism which reflects a transformation from a biological view of race and nation to a cultural approach to nationhood. Gilroy (1987, 60) characterizes British and English attitudes towards nationhood and racial integration as follows:

Alien (i.e. black) cultures have been introduced into this country with disastrous effect ... The increased competition for limited resources and the variety of disruptive behaviours introduced by the immigrant population create problems for the national community. The most profound difficulties are uncovered by trying to dilute our nationhood and national culture so that they can accommodate alien interlopers and their formally but not substantively British children.

Mrs Taylor’s experience certainly mirrors Gilroy’s portrait of this era. Indeed, she describes the 1970s and raising her four children as the most difficult time of her life, to the extent that the family contemplated moving back to Jamaica or remigrating to the United States. Mrs Taylor spent five nights per week working as a nurse while her husband came home every evening, cleaned up from dinner and put their children to bed. Each morning Mrs Taylor came home from work, prepared breakfast and sent the children to school. However, one of her sons had a learning disability. Mrs Taylor spent days travelling back and forth between home and school trying to fight for her son’s right to learn. In the end, she felt that the schools underestimated his potential and sent him to a school for the “dumb” because he had a learning disability and was black. Twenty-five years later, she still wonders what would have happened if she had sent him back to Jamaica, but realistically Mr and Mrs Taylor never had the option because “the money wasn’t there”.

Returnees also felt that the 1970s and early 1980s were difficult for their children who, although born in England, were denied full access to their rights as British citizens. Unlike their parents, the second generation lacked the attachment to their West Indian heritage that played a significant role in their well-meaning parents' negotiation and tolerance of racism (Gilroy 1987). Mrs Grant, for example, could recall the disappointment and shame the first time she received a call from the police saying that her son (normally a "good boy") had a run-in after attending a club, and Mrs Tulloch remembers constantly worrying about her son getting "mixed up" with the wrong crowd, the ones involved in ganja smoking. Cashmore (1995) argues that during this time Rastafarianism became a particularly cogent symbol of resistance for disenfranchised British black youths¹⁴. The global popularity of Bob Marley served to further enhance Rastafarianism's appeal, and Cashmore contends that while the US-based Black Power movement "in its overtly political form might have captured a few minds...Rastafari, by contrast, phrased its critique in a religious form" (Cashmore 1995, 184–185). Rastafarianism explicitly addressed the ideological use of Christianity by white European culture, rejecting the concept that one must endure through hardship because salvation will come in the afterlife. In terms of racial consciousness, particularly the valuation of blackness, Rastafarianism turned away from the painful use of the comb and, similar to the development of the Afro in the Black Power movement, allowed the hair to grow naturally into dreadlocks. Moreover, the features, colour and texture of hair associated with blackness were recognised as beautiful rather than something to be erased or hidden (Chevannes 1995).

Getting your colour back

The new experiences and developments within the UK's West Indian community prompted many returnees to interrogate their assumptions about the meaning of being black. Mrs Clarke, a fifty-year-old returnee reflecting on the change in racial consciousness, told me how shocked she was to hear one of the older returnees she went to church with lamenting over her "brown" grandson's choice of a "black" wife; Mrs Clarke openly questioned how the woman could make such a statement after the years of mistreatment due merely to skin colour in England. For Mrs Clarke, there was a general acknowledgement that blackness and being black could be positive, reversing (or at the very least altering) the "white bias" of the 1950s and 1960s. As Goulbourne (1998) describes, "The paradox is that black and brown people often share the same culture with whites who determine the nature of incorporation, but the racial affinity is nearly always stronger than cultural ties...race relations pivoted upon the divide of the colour-line remain relevant in Britain" (152–153). Clearly, the experience of racism in England transformed the Jamaican returnees' conceptions of what it means to be English, or more specifically for the post-WWII generation migrants, what it means *not* to be English. Although most returnees lived over half of their lives in England, they continued to be asked where they were from. If they responded like the English and mentioned their locality, such as East London or Croydon, they were met with the response "no, where

¹⁴ Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow (1987, 96) attribute transformations in racial consciousness in Britain during this era to the "rhetoric and symbols...[of] the Black Power movement in the United States" and state that "Black American forms have been transplanted and reworked in a new environment" and "provid[e] a ready-made vehicle for expressions of Black consciousness".

are you *really* from?” For this generation, however, where “you born and grow” shapes one’s identity and sense of self and, for many returnees, such questions concerning their origins did not disturb them, particularly as their plans to return concretised¹⁵. Many returnees acknowledged that these issues would be much more difficult for their children, some returnees advising their sons and daughters that “the English can be funny” and that England remains “a strange country in as much as you were born there”, one more indication that returnees did not feel they were English.

In addition to altering returnees’ ideas of Englishness, the experience of racism in England also changed the meaning of being Jamaican. For example, when Mrs Cole, Sister B and I were talking about a recent visit to England, Sister B looked up at the sky and flung her arms out embracing the sun and proclaimed that it was “so wonderful to be back in the Jamaican sun and get my colour back.” Hearing Sister B’s comment, Mrs Cole started chuckling about how fair she had become sitting in her job in a factory in England, so fair that every time her English workmates returned from holiday they felt compelled to compare their new tans with her sun-deprived brown skin. Noting how ironic it was that her white workmates were so keen to brown their skin, but were reticent about accepting brown or black people, Mrs Cole acknowledged that she too felt, and indeed welcomed, the idea that she had regained her colour once she returned to Jamaica; they often described their skin colour in England as grey or “ashy”. Mrs Cole and Sister B’s discussion reveals none of the sun avoidance and bleaching measures described by Henriques and further suggests that pigmentation change, particularly turning darker, appears to indicate for many returnees that they are not only back on the island but also *belong* in Jamaica. There is, therefore, a curious symmetry with the arrival in England turning Jamaicans into blacks based on colour and not background and the re-arrival in Jamaica turning them into “the English” but which returnees deny because being English now represents a colour category. Calling returnees “the English” negates the physical, mental and emotional transformation returnees underwent while living in England.

Reframing Respectability

Throughout this paper, I focused on the experience of migration and return, with particular attention to the ways in which moving between places — Jamaica, England, Mandeville and home — correspond with transformations in returnees’ understandings of respectability.¹⁶ For English colonial planters and their families, Mandeville became a location where they could create a home away from home, and the wives of the planters could demonstrate Victorian-inspired norms of domesticity and respectability. Mandeville’s association with Englishness certainly suggests a degree of success. Noting the prevalence of “fair”, “coloured” or “upper class” residents living in Mandeville,

¹⁵ However, James (1993) observes that for the elderly who could not return, the fact that they would never be seen as belonging, or as being English, was quite painful (See also Byron 1999).

¹⁶ A concept first elucidated by Peter Wilson (1995, 1964), respectability, or the realm of legal, official and “respectable” (i.e. European) culture and its associated institutions (e.g. marriage, the church and the educational system), is often juxtaposed with the concept of reputation. In Wilson’s configuration, men tend to dominate the public nature of the reputation system, or the realm of “local” culture which is based upon equality and the display of verbal skill (among other characteristics); women become the cultural bearers of respectability. Among a range of other critiques, Jean Besson (2002) suggests Wilson’s reputation-respectability model negates women’s presence in activities such as peasant’s resistance and participation in the labour market (see also Freeman 2000, 2007).

Henriques (1953) described Mandeville as “Jamaica’s Cheltenham” and historian H. P. Jacobs (1994, 1) observed that “Manchester was the only area in which the English ever came anywhere near to achieving their original idea of establishing a tropical New England”. The landscape of Mandeville, with its historical Anglican church, well-appointed homes and carefully cultivated domesticity, effectively came to embody a particular version of respectability.

Returnees underscore Mandeville’s importance for the attainment of a respectable lifestyle in retirement in terms of the climate, sense of community, as well as the area’s economic prosperity and status. Living in the salubrious hills of Mandeville signals achievement and a feeling of accomplishment, and returnees are keen to realise a respectable lifestyle associated with Mandeville, particularly by maintaining a proper house as well as participating in the community through church, voluntary and charitable associations. Whereas Peter Wilson (1964) might have tied the return of post-WWII Jamaican migrants to England to the continued “mental colonialism” of the Jamaican elite (and returnees), returnee women reframe their notion of respectability by questioning the connection between Mandeville, colour and culture. As the discussion of getting one’s colour back reveals, female returnees reject the notion that attaining the symbols of a respectable retirement in Mandeville reflects the internalization of English values, or the reproduction of Victorian values of respectability. Due in part to a general disenchantment with the English, particularly the English working and middle class, many women noted that the benefits of returning to Jamaica included the appreciation of their achievements while working and raising a family in England, and their experience of the positive aspects of Jamaican culture as they had remembered and imagined them while abroad, such as the accord of respect to the elderly, the valorisation of mothers in the family as well as the proper expression of success, or attainment of respectability.

Yet, the emphasis on the symbols of success and the maintenance of the respectable home does present particular dilemmas for many female returnees. Unlike in England where, given accessible public transportation or use of their own vehicle, Jamaican women readily moved through their neighbourhoods and cities and husbands were forced to participate in housework and childcare, the stress on living a respectable retirement curtailed many women’s mobility. Most returnee women spent the majority of time at home cooking and, in most cases, monitoring the activities of their helpers. The stress on maintaining a large home, with tiled floors and white paint indicative of a returnee home resulted in a great deal of work and reveals what, in many returnees’ lives, emerged as the tyranny of respectability. While there were a variety of strategies to subvert and escape this tyranny — participation in church and civic associations, regular visits to children in England or America and the creative re-tiling and re-painting of floors and walls — there remains the sense among many returnee women that the seemingly inherent respectability of Mandeville often works to exacerbate the gendered dimensions of respectability.

Acknowledgements

Research for this article was supported by a grant from the Central Research Fund and the Department of Anthropology, University College London. I am grateful to Dr. Patricia Mohammed as well as Ashgate Publishing for permission to re-publish an earlier version of this paper.

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The University of
the West Indies
Centre for Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

“Neither Lend Out Your Hole To Achieve Piece of Gold” — Child Abuse, Bling Addiction and Soca Music in Trinidad and Tobago

Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar

Abstract

The above title’s lyrical excerpt is taken from Trinidadian soca artist Bunji Garlin’s 2003 song “Dignity”, in which he addresses youth who are engaging in prostitution and transactional sexⁱ. In the song, Garlin chastises those who participate in such acts, while celebrating those who abstain by maintaining their “dignity”:

You know life is like a car and dignity is the clutch
And some people love automatic and don’t want to clutch too much
You know they have no dignity no integrity no purity they have no kind of sanity
Jeezanages all they dealing with is profanity
Hand up so!
If yuh never sell yuh body just to make some money hands up lemme see
Hand up so!
Tru you never sell out your soul neither lend out your hole to achieve piece of
gold
hand up so!
Tru you keep your dignity your pride and integrity well hands up lemme see

hand up so! (2003b)

The Caribbean has a long history of the sexualization and commodification of bodies, from the exploitation, enslavement, brutalization, fear of, and fascination with, Indigenous people by the Spanish, through the centuries of brutality enacted on African, Asian and mixed race bodies by the colonizers during the eras of slavery and indentureship, onto the present day where we find increases in the levels of tourism (including sex tourism), sexual violence and alarming rates of HIV infection (Kempadoo 2004; Sheller 2003; UNAIDS 2006). Research which addresses these themes, historical or contemporary, has focused almost exclusively on the adult body and psyche. Studies specifically of Caribbean sexualityⁱⁱ have also been focused on adults; much less is known about the sexuality of Caribbean youth, including issues of sexual abuse as it relates to both adolescents and children. This paper examines the linkages between increasing levels of violence and abuse against children/youth in the twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, the detrimental aftereffects of such abuse on survivors (anger, shame, dissociation, low self-esteem, depression, addiction, substance abuse, disconnection from self-care, prostitution, violent and non-violent criminal behaviour) (Caputi 2003; Ray 2001; Medrano et al 2003; Campbell et al 2003; Gore-Felton et al 2006; Parsons et al 2005) and posits that a history of childhood sexual abuse in particular may be linked to addictive behaviours, and the propensity for engaging in prostitution and/or transactional sex in order to feed these addictions.

Introduction

In short, increasing levels of childhood sexual abuse in the nation may be a factor in the rising rates of crimes and destructive behaviours being committed by youth. The role of popular culture, specifically music such as soca, can both expose this reality (following in the tradition of the social commentary calypso) and offer a cathartic release from the pain, rage and shame associated with a history of abuse. Other forms of popular music (especially rap and dancehall) more often convey less liberatory messages; on the contrary offering encouragement and incentive to feed addictions, including what I refer to as bling addiction, that is, the addiction to expensive but status-providing material luxury goods, goods that one will procure by any means necessary, that is, through violence, crime, prostitution, and transactional sex.

The lengths to which many youth are willing to go to achieve and maintain a bling lifestyle raises a few questions. Firstly, do many youth feel they so desperately need the acquisition of material goods, i.e. are they as addicted to the acquisition of these goods as one would be to crack cocaine, that they will sell their body or commit acts of violence to get them? Secondly, is the apparent nonchalance of surrendering one's body and sexuality for purely material gain among young people reflective of a deeper horror, that of rising rates of child sexual abuse (molestation, rape and incest) and a resulting consequence of dissociation from one's body, emotions and sexuality that many survivors of childhood sexual abuse face? Thirdly, what role does popular culture contribute to the attitudes of youth? Specifically, what role does soca music play in the attitudes of Trinbagonianⁱⁱⁱ youth as compared to other forms of popular music found in the nation? In particular, how do dancehall, hip hop, rap music and videos (many of which celebrate the importance of bling, teach violence and glorify death, and perpetuate problematic sexual scripts^{iv}), and television stations such as BET (Black Entertainment Television, beamed in through satellite) contribute to the attitudes of youth? I will begin this discussion by examining two of the most recognisable sexual scripts found in Trinbagonian culture — the jamette and the sweetman.

The Jamette and the Sweetman — an “inevitable whoredom”

It is important to place the idea of exchanging sex-for-money within an historical Caribbean context. Scholars such as Kamala Kempadoo have done some very significant work in this area, clearly making historical links between Caribbean sexuality and the economy (2004). The idea of the woman or man exchanging sex for goods or money is certainly not an unusual theme in Trinbagonian popular culture. For example, in his novel *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Earl Lovelace describes the reality and expectation for many young girls in low-income areas of Trinidad (in this case, Calvary Hill) as an “inevitable whoredom” (1979, 44). This is described through the character of the teenage “princess” of the neighbourhood, Sylvia:

...for she knew then, already, with that instinctive knowing by seventeen years on this hill, that between this man, the rent collector, and her mother, a woman with seven children and no man either, she

was the gift arranged even before she knew it, even without the encouragement or connivance of her mother. She was the sacrifice. So she would let him pat her on the head, feel his hand sliding down her back going over the hill of her buttocks, and, mischievously, she sometimes stood still, as if she needed to perfect that unflinching steadiness and triumphant surrender fitted for the whoredom that was her destiny if not her calling (39–40).

Lovelace's description of the inevitability of sex-for-money for many young women, of Caribbean female bodies for sale, of human beings as possessions and objects, is nothing new. As aforementioned, the objectification and commodification of Caribbean bodies has been a historical reality for centuries. However, for the most part, it has been Caribbean women — especially African, Indigenous, and Indian — who have been the most likely to be sexually exploited.

The role of the Caribbean man as commodified (hetero)sexual object has been less prevalent (with the exception of male African slaves who were at times objectified as “studs” for the purposes of producing more slaves), simply because colonial women could not exert the same power and domination over colonized male bodies with the same impunity that colonial men had. However, the Caribbean male as financially dependent consort (sometimes illicit, in terms of cross-class or cross-race liaisons), the sweet man or kept man, is a common theme in popular culture. One early literary example from the 1930s is found in Alfred H. Mendes' story “Sweetman”, in which a world of unemployed men “kept” by working-class women, women who may also be exchanging sex for money with other men, is portrayed:

Sweetman, for him, was a man kept entirely by a woman. Such a man never did any work, and the truth is that Maxie, though twenty-four at the time, had never done a stitch of work in his life. So far, because of his fine voice, attractive person and facility for dancing, women had kept him: had worked for him, had fed him, had clothed him and had given him everything else he wanted. Whenever he had spare money, he gambled....The only condition tacitly exacted by the women from the man in the bargain of his becoming her sweetman was that he should be faithful to her. On the other hand, in times of want, it was understood that she could take other men: and the money earned in such traffic was invariably handed over to the man (1978, 120).

In this world, both men and women accept the practice of prostitution and transactional sex as a given, sometimes to sustain one's family (Sylvia and the rent collector) or to make ends meet (Mendes' reference to women resorting to prostitution “in times of want”). Prostitution and transactional sex in these examples are linked to achieving the basics of life and/or to elevating one's self socially. For example, in Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Aldrick, a determinedly unemployed man on Calvary Hill, assesses Sylvia's situation with Guy the rent collector:

That was how things were, and, in a way, it was better it was Guy, who could give her a little money and buy her some clothes, than one of those rank little boys who ain't working nowhere... Better Guy...who might, if his heart soften, even try to get her a job in a store downtown, give her some kinda protection, some kinda chance to escape this hill (45–46).

Such descriptions of the female *jamette*, the loose woman or prostitute, and the sweet man, unemployed but supported by a woman or women, abound in both calypso and Caribbean literature. They have also been a staple of Trinidad and Tobago's indigenous musical art form, the calypso, a theme I discuss later in this paper. However, although these sexual scripts have become normalized for the most part in popular culture, I am interested in examining possible present-day linkages between the practice of prostitution/transactional sex among Trinbagonian youth and the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse in the society.

Children, youth and sexual abuse in Trinidad and Tobago

It appears that there are increasingly high rates of child sexual abuse, including incest, in Trinidad and Tobago. A textual analysis of newspaper reports between 2004 and 2006 shows an increasing focus on and concern in the society with child abuse, partially due to the reportage of specific incidents which were especially horrific and caused a nationwide outcry.^v According to Patricia Bernard, Executive Director of the Rape Crisis Centre in Trinidad, "The figures tell that within the society of Trinidad and Tobago we have a high perpetration of sexual crimes against children" (Kissoon 2005). Similarly, in 2004, child psychologist Dr. Karen Moore, who had participated ten years earlier in the 1994 study on youth crime, stated that child molestation cuts across class lines, and that there had been a sharp increase in reported incidents of older children abusing younger ones. She also noted that she was "frightened" by what she had seen ten years ago: "heavy drug dealing and drug use, drinking binges and prostitution rings in seven-year schools". According to Moore, the youth violence now evident in the society at large was just the smoke and that "the fire is right behind" (Marajh 2004b). In her statement, Moore is making important links between a history of childhood sexual abuse and consequent violent and criminal behaviour.

Beverly King, a front-line HIV-counsellor, stated in a 2005 newspaper report that there was "widespread incest, child sexual abuse, youth sexual activity, drug abuse and even prostitution among minors in T & T" (Martin 2005a). At a 2006 seminar on child sexual abuse awareness, child psychiatrist Dr. Samuel Shafe stated that although there had been more reported cases of sodomization of children and adolescents in recent years, the exact rate was difficult to determine due to underreporting and lack of awareness of what constitutes abuse (Mackhan 2006). Child rights activist Gregory Sloane-Seale echoes this sentiment: "I think over the last two decades the problem has really mushroomed into what you see now.... For every story that is found out or reported, there may be ten more. I think things have worsened. I see it practically every day" (Martin 2005b).

The corpus of existing scholarship on child abuse has consistently addressed the victimization of girls more than that of boys. Sloane-Seale emphasised the way in which

boys who are sexually abused are viewed less sympathetically than girls, and have a harder time seeking support due to societal homophobia (Martin 2005b). Emerging scholarship coming out of the United States has begun to examine the links between male prostitution and a history of childhood sexual abuse (Gore-Felton et al 2006; Medrano et al 2003; Parsons et al 2005). The relationship between the willingness of young men and boys to surrender their bodies as objects of abuse or as commodities and the amount of time spent in prisons and juvenile detention centres, where incidents of rape are high, also needs to be noted. A 2004 study of inmates in the Trinidadian prison system showed that 97% are from poor homes, 70% functionally illiterate and “most had some history of abuse — sexual, physical and emotional” (Marajh 2004c).

Many abused children flee the home: in 1998 it was reported that an estimated 500 children live on the streets of Port-of-Spain. The report also stated that at-risk youth who were interviewed described the reasons for their resorting to crime as “poor parenting, distorted role models, lack of support structures in the school and communities... [and] some suggested a strong correlation between their involvement in crime and their private hell as abused and impoverished children” (Marajh 2004a). The “private hell” can include the experience of incest, probably the most taboo and therefore underreported and under-researched area of sexual abuse. An example of the impact of silencing on this issue can be found in the activism of a group of youth who have felt the issue of incest was serious enough that something had to be done about it. In 2001, a report by the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition on the Rights of the Child (TTCRC) stated as follows:

A group of child members under 18 hosted two workshops during November, specifically dealing with incest because they felt that it was a serious problem in Trinidad and Tobago that “adults” were not effectively combating. Their workshops went well and they aim to take their cause to schools throughout the country to engage students in the discussion of this particularly controversial topic (Sloane-Seale 2001).

The impact of tourism on levels of child abuse is particularly relevant to Tobago more so than Trinidad, as the latter, rich with oil and other natural resources, does not rely on tourism to the extent that Tobago does. The heavy impact of tourism on Tobagonian society has become a greater concern in recent years. A 1997 report on sex tourism in Tobago stated that, along with the increase of Tobagonians (men and women, boys and girls) prostituting themselves to foreign tourists and an alarming increase in resulting HIV infection and AIDS, was a correlating problem of incest: “...young people become sexually active at an early age. Men are expected to ‘have’ more than one woman at a time, and incest is common — some say rampant.” The report came out of a conference on Youth, Family Life, Mental Health and AIDS, which was held after the death of a 14-year-old HIV-positive girl who “confessed to having had sexual relations with more than 30 men between the ages of 19 and 29” (Gibbings 1997).

The rate of AIDS in both Trinidad and Tobago is rapidly rising and the estimated national adult prevalence exceeds 2% of the population (UNAIDS 2006). AIDS is now the second

ranking cause of death among men ages 25–34 years, and third ranking among men 15–24 (Gibbings 1997); teenage girls 15–19 years are six times as likely to be infected with HIV as their male counterparts (UNAIDS 2006).^{vi} Studies done on both male and female survivors of childhood sexual abuse have pointed to a consistent propensity to risk-associated sexual behaviours which include the increased risk of exposure to HIV (Gore-Felton et al 2006; Parsons et al 2005; Medrano et al 2003).

What this data points to is a harsh reality for many young Trinbagonians: sexual abuse, including rape and incest, which sometimes results in a life of prostitution and transactional sex. To make the links between the rates of child abuse being reported in the society and the disturbing behaviours found among marginalized youth, we need to turn to the existing research available on survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Studies on female survivors of abuse have consistently delineated a number of disturbing outcomes, ranging from a sense of powerlessness and loss of identity (Leenerts 1999), to feelings of “anger, shame, impotence, guilt, feelings of inferiority, worthlessness, depression” (Caputi 2003, 2), to “violent and nonviolent criminal behaviour” (Herrera and McCloskey 2003, 319). Studies of both men and women survivors found that “a history of childhood sexual abuse is associated with exchanging sex for money as an adult” (Campbell et al 2003, 300), as well as a “greater likelihood...[of being] diagnosed with substance abuse disorders...posttraumatic stress disorder, and borderline personality disorder” (Medrano et al 2003, 465).

The research which focuses specifically on male survivors of incest and sexual abuse has shown that many of these men later in life suffer from “fear, anger, depression, self-destructive behaviour...feelings of isolation, shame and stigma...and a tendency towards revictimization and possibly sexual offending toward children” as well as “antisocial sexual and aggressive activity...suicide attempts...[and] addictions to alcohol, drugs and sex” (Ray 2001). The experience of repetitive trauma that many survivors have undergone results in symptoms of dissociation, a state of “altered consciousness” in which “the individual may experience distortion of memory, affect, perception, or sense of identity. The dissociated person may experience altered perception of somatic sensations and time, periods of amnesia, unreality, and depersonalization” (Scaer 2007, 75). Stein, in her study of child abuse, dissociation and crime, stated that “people growing up in extremely neglectful or abusive homes habitually resort to dissociation — not only defensively, but preemptively too. It becomes a way of hosting aggression without acknowledging its toll” (2007, 3). In other words, survivors of trauma and abuse can either act out, detach, self-abuse, freeze, but all in a state of “not-being”, a place of detachment from their present reality and immediate surroundings.

A history of abuse, as already noted, can result in low self-esteem and a loss of self. It is no surprise, then, that many youth feel hopeless, even apathetic, about a future. That sense of hopelessness and despair can also result in rage and numbness, which are either acted out in destructive behaviour (crimes against others) or directed internally (crimes against oneself, i.e. suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, self-destructive behaviour). John Rougier, Deputy Commissioner of Prisons for Trinidad and Tobago, was reported as saying that “anger was the common theme linking them (inmates) to the criminal chain of

risk-taking and faster living” (Marajh 2004c). Rougier stated, “We have a new breed of criminals in the system. These people don’t have a conscience...Their spiritual and moral values, if they ever had, are gone” (Ibid.).

I would like to frame Rougier’s comments within the context of research done by Abby Stein on prison inmates and histories of child abuse, in which she states, “Conscience and remorse are present — maybe even abundant — in the criminal but are unseen...[m]oral disengagement characterizes much of human action, both by choice and unconscious necessity; in people who were horribly maltreated in childhood, selective disengagement is tantamount to survival” (2007, xvi-xvii). The lack of research available on the histories of those who commit often brutal and violent crimes in Trinidad and Tobago reveals a disconnect between the mistreatment of children in the society (which is now being documented) and the apparently escalating crime situation in the nation. It appears that only those working the frontline (social workers etc.) and some cultural producers are pointing to the connection.

One outlet for the sense of hopelessness and pain that many of these youth experience is immediate gratification — because who knows if you will live to see tomorrow? This becomes an attractive “fix”, whether that is the purchase of coveted material goods, or seeking escape through unprotected sex, drugs and/or alcohol. As Ralph states in his study of hip hop youth culture, the idea that one is living on “surplus time”, that is, has outlived, however temporarily, one’s supposed date of expiry, contributes to a mentality of living for the moment, and a fascination with conspicuous consumption (61). The pursuit of material goods becomes more of an addiction, a necessity, an aspect of survival, rather than a benign and meaningless pursuit of material gratification for the purpose of status, for example. It is out of these findings that I now turn to a discussion of bling addiction and the reason why survivors of childhood sexual abuse may be particularly prone both to exchanging sex for money/material goods and to being addicted to the acquisition of said goods.

Bling addiction

The term “bling” or “bling bling” became a part of North American popular culture in the late 1990s, particularly with hip hop artists and rappers from the “Dirty South” (southern United States). According to the online *Urban Dictionary.com*, “bling bling” is “a synonym for expensive, often flashy jewelry, sported mostly by African-American hip-hop artists and middle class Caucasian adolescents”. The term has become so widespread and popular that in 2004 it was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oh 2003). Bling describes the material markers of success for an increasingly marginalized African-American underclass, in which self-worth becomes measured through the acquisition and display of ever-increasing conspicuous consumption. Bling can refer to both bodily adornment: platinum and diamond jewelry and dental caps, full-mouth jewellery (grills), but also the adornment of one’s (expensive) automobile with such items as chrome rims. Bling can also extend to accessories, most notably in projecting the hypermasculine “pimp” persona, with accompanying pimp cup and pimp cane that are diamond encrusted and indicative of a “royal” status among one’s peers (the proverbial chalice and sceptre of a king). Although conspicuous consumption and adornment have been a part of African-

American culture for many decades (and, one could even argue, has its roots in West African displays of wealth and prosperity), the level to which contemporary bling has reached is somewhat staggering. There is also the phenomenon of “upping the ante”, in which that which holds status and was desirable today is discarded tomorrow; therefore one must continually be able to “outdo” oneself and one’s peers to achieve the next trend (which is often more costly than the last). For example, in the 1980s many rappers wore massive gold chains. Today, gold is passé — platinum (more costly) is desired. Originally, rappers may have sported a gold tooth, perhaps a diamond embedded in an incisor. This fashion has evolved into sporting a full mouth of diamond and platinum grills. What this translates into is an increased pressure on young people, especially those who may measure their own self-worth very strongly on the ability to achieve these trends, to acquire goods which are increasingly beyond their reach — not only bling but designer clothes, sunglasses, hats, expensive footwear, cellphones, purses, etc. Depending on the perception of the need for such goods (and here is where I am inserting the concept of an addiction to bling), youth may opt to pursue any number of avenues to “achieve they trends” as Garlin states in the song “Dignity”. Addiction is described by Peele as follows:

...a habitual response and a source of gratification or security...An addiction may involve *any* attachment or sensation that grows to such proportions that it damages a person’s life. [It] follow[s] certain common patterns...the single-minded grasping of a magic-seeming object or involvement; the loss of control, perspective, and priorities... (1992, 42).

The impact of such a desire for the acquisition of material goods operates differently in a small economy nation such as Trinidad and Tobago from the way it does in the United States. However, Trinidad especially, among Caribbean nations, has a history of conspicuous consumption, most notably due to the existence of oil as a major driver of the nation’s economy, and certainly during the era of rapid economic expansion and overblown consumption in the 1970s which was known as the Oil Boom Years. This economic boom was followed by a recession in the 1980s, and although there is still a lot of wealth in the country, it is not accessible to all citizens equally. Increasingly, there is a division in the society between the very wealthy and the very poor. Furthermore, Trinidad and Tobago, like much of the Caribbean, imports a lot of American goods (including culture, via satellite television and the Internet), all of which are influential on the populace. The impact of what I call the “Bling Era” on Trinbagonian youth is becoming more noticeable. How this era differs from other eras of conspicuous consumption in the nation may be noted in three ways: 1) the exorbitant cost of many of the desired and imported items is unprecedented, and prices are inflating constantly; 2) there is an increased willingness on the part of youth to “achieve their trends” (acquire said goods) “by any means necessary” (sign of an addiction), including crime and prostitution/transactional sex; and 3) the pursuit of wealth “by any means necessary” is not tied to the provision of basic survival needs, that is, food, shelter, family support. The items that youth are coveting are hardly essential to sustaining life or to their own self-betterment; they are instead luxuries and symbols of status among their peer group. That

young people may be willing to sacrifice their lives, well-being, dignity, health or safety to procure these goods points to a deeper underlying problem.

In his study of American hip hop culture, Michael Ralph describes the “preoccupation with death, fascination with ‘bling’, and denigration of women” as recurring and popular themes in rap music, which reflect a sense of death as both “inevitable and imminent” for young black males (2006, 61– 63). According to Ralph, “this sense of impending demise is linked to the emphasis on spending as much as one can before making one’s transition, or the propensity for conspicuous consumption poetically condensed by the slang euphemism ‘bling’” (63). Similarly, rising rates of crimes committed by young people in Trinidad and Tobago, according to a 1994 report that examined juvenile delinquency and youth crime, attest to an increasingly violent and abusive environment in which youth find themselves. One example that indicates a link between crime and bling occurred in Trinidad in 2004. In August of that year, one day prior to a popular Jamaican dancehall show, a supermarket supervisor was robbed and chopped to death, almost to the point of decapitation, and the crime was linked to the upcoming concert. Police stated that “whenever there are any international concerts, with performers from Jamaica and the United States, there is an increase in robberies just before the event” (Heeralal 2004). Ostensibly, the youth committing these crimes were not only looking for ticket money, but money to purchase material goods (bling, clothes, shoes) to wear to the show.

Bunji Garlin speaks directly to ghetto youth who find themselves caught up in such materialistic pursuits. Importantly, he touches on what may have previously been a taboo topic in soca/calypso, one that has been overlooked and/or ignored by other soca and calypso artists, that is, the increase in young men (not only women) selling their bodies for bling, cars, drugs, and housing, and not in the traditional role of the sweetman marketing himself to a woman, but instead by engaging in transactional sex acts with other men. For example, in the aforementioned “Dignity”, Garlin states:

Well believe it or not
 Some of them achieve they trends because they get their bottom hole clog up
 even some gyal who greedy for all they get all their clothes cause they clitoris
 mash up
 some not no work they rather be a jerk they rather to get all uh their body part
 touch up
 rather get touch up rather get smash up imagine this
 some of them boys confuse some uh them don’t know theyself they macking in
 blues^{vii}
 gettin their bottom bruise
 to get a pair of shoes
 some of them doing it for piles and cruise
 either them smoke coke or drink too much booze
 some of them do it for a place of refuge
 only a gyal supposed to ride on something huge (2003b)

It is Garlin's description of a gendered reality in which both young women and men are exploiting themselves to purchase material goods, or to satisfy a drug addiction, that differs from previous depictions of sexual exploitation in the calypso and soca genres, which focused solely on women prostituting themselves to men. As well, the reasons for the prostitution of oneself have less to do with obtaining the necessities of survival (food, shelter, supporting children and family) and more to do with acquiring non-essential material goods and/or to support a drug or an alcohol habit. A 1995 report on AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago noted that the high incidence of cocaine addiction in the nation contributed to rising rates of prostitution for both men and women, as well as correlating rising rates of HIV infection (Henry and Newton 1995, 4). Other studies in the United States have consistently found a correlation between childhood sexual abuse, substance abuse and high-risk sexual behaviours (Medrano et al 2003), including "engagement in behaviours that carry risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases" (Parsons et al 2005, 3), such as prostituting oneself.

It must be noted that Garlin's lyrics reflect a contempt for any form of homosexual behaviour ("Only a gal supposed to ride on something huge") which is both reflective of strongly homophobic lyrics in dancehall, and a calypso tradition in which homosexuals are described in a derogatory manner (Rohlehr 2004). This raises the question as to whether Garlin's own negativity towards homosexuality is one of the flags that draws him to comment on this particular societal ill (male-male transactional sex) he sees going on in his community. While Garlin is exhibiting apparent outrage at child abuse, it is still couched within the Caribbean tradition of (hyper)masculinity and heteropatriarchy, the latter denoting the following:

...a structuring principle in Caribbean societies that privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates female sexuality, normalizing relations of power that are intolerant of and oppressive toward sexual desires and practices that are outside of or oppose the dominant sexual and gender regimes (Kempadoo 2004, 9).

In this sense, Garlin's position is contradictory in that it appears progressive by refusing to silence the horrific abuse of women and children in the society, but also is equally critical of any sexual interactions between men. This follows in the long tradition of both silencing and ridicule in calypso and soca music of "other" expressions of sexuality that deviate from heterosexual norms.

Sex and calypso

In the Caribbean context, sexuality "seems to be something that men have and are free to explore, while women are expected to relate to it only defensively" (Lewis 7, 2003). Within the tradition of the calypso, long a male-dominated field, we see "a living tradition of overwhelmingly, though not exclusively male discourse about everything under the sun" (Rohlehr 2004, 326). This discourse includes narratives of heterosexuality, and one which reflects an attitude towards sexuality which is often playful, open and uninhibited. There are numerous accounts of macho braggadocio such as the Mighty Sparrow's "Village Ram", or tales of seduction by the wily man-of-words, or the

verbosity of the “sweet man” (a man financially supported by women) caught with his proverbial pants down, needing to convince his woman/women of his innocence. Calypso has historically been the brunt of criticism and censure by the upper echelons of Caribbean society, usually not themselves cultural producers, for portraying and celebrating sexuality. Soca music, a more up-tempo offshoot of calypso that does not focus as much on lyrical content but rather has “held closely to its stated imperative: party” (Best 2004, 100), has over the last several decades become the driving musical force during the Carnival season, and is currently the music of choice, along with reggae, dancehall and hip hop/R&B, among Trinbagonian youth.

Current debates in Trinidad and Tobago have focused on the lyrics of some soca and calypso artists whose music is defined as being too vulgar, offensive, and sexually explicit and “slack”. However, calypso has traditionally been a vehicle of social commentary, particularly for racially and economically marginalized groups in the society (although more often excluding women). More problematic issues of sexual abuse, rape, incest, and child molestation have seldom, if ever, been acknowledged.^{viii} The prostitution of women, although acknowledged in calypso as a fact of life, part of the everyday world of the calypsonian, has been described predominantly from a male point of view, and at times in an unforgiving way towards the women who “make fares” for a living (i.e. Sparrow’s “Jean and Dinah” and Growler’s “In the Dew and the Rain”) (Mohammed 2003, 152). Conversely, the figure of the male equivalent — the sweet man or saga boy, a man “kept” financially by women — has been celebrated as a “‘smart man’, quite adept at deceiving willing females into granting certain favours” (Warner 1982, 99). One figure that has been invisible until recently is the male who is kept by other males, or who receives material goods from males in exchange for sexual favours.

In “Dignity”, Bunji Garlin addresses not only the commodification of female, but also male, sexuality, linking both to an overarching desire to acquire expensive, superfluous, material goods: bling. Similarly, in “Bank Before Rank”, Garlin takes on the young men who “fake” status by appearing to have all the accoutrements of wealth — bling, cars, clothes, but are “mamaguying” (fooling) everyone in a desperate attempt to display “rank”, even if it means selling one’s body to other males:

See you in the [word unclear] and you in a Bentley
 looking wealthy but your belly it empty
 as you reach Trinidad you jump in a maxi
 to look as if you know you hiring taxi
 one cellular phone - you don’t get battery
 but you say you managing clothes in a factory
 call yuh girlfriend yuh know you can’t contact she
 somebody else done whap she

this kinda bling ting influential
 so before it get detrimental
 and you come join up to you mental
 and you go insane inna your mental

save your money and get a car in Central
 stop using your rectum to pay for a rental
 take some guidance - that's parental
 save up on your credential (2003a)

Here, Garlin addresses those who put “rank before bank” — in other words, try to achieve or portray status (through the display of material goods) without the “bank” (capital) to back it up. He states that such an obsession with and addiction to the acquisition of such goods can actually lead one to insanity or to commit self-destructive acts.

Social commentary, soca music and catharsis

As aforementioned, calypso has played an important role in Trinbagonian society as a cultural form of social commentary. Since the rise in popularity of soca music in the 1980s, there has been an ongoing debate in the nation, and abroad, over the differences, lyrically and otherwise, between calypso and soca. Recently, in the genre of soca music there has been an increase in more sexually explicit lyrics. By explicit, I am referring to the alleged “death” of the double entendre, something which gives fodder to those who argue that soca signals “the death knell of the art form” of calypso (Smith 2005). Many traditional calypso enthusiasts bemoan the fact that young soca artists seem to lack the verbal and lyrical skills which have always been important components of calypso. Some critics have argued that this is due to an ailing educational system; for example, the Youth Training Centre in Trinidad and Tobago found that the majority of boys in their peer counselling programme could “barely string two sentences together”, while other studies indicate that an estimated 40,000 students currently in the school system have literacy problems (Marajh 2004a).

When it comes to soca lyrics, it is often no-holds-barred: young men performing soca, much like young men “sooting” women on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago, leave nothing to the imagination in their verbal assault of each woman’s anatomy and sexual attributes. Paralleling the Carnival costumes of today, we are talking about “naked” lyrics: in your face, up front and raw. As Leu states, “...in the new soca the transgression is open and unabashed, frequently dispensing with coded language and oblique references in favour of an unprecedented freedom in what is still a very conservative, religious society” (2000, 49). However, is it possible that the new “nakedness” of soca lyrics, at least among some artists, is reflective of an increasing “nakedness” of violence and abuse that are prevalent in the society? Is this rawness a new form of social commentary, or a form of cultural resistance in its own right, addressing unprecedented levels of brutality that can no longer be as easily couched in metaphor and double entendre? Perhaps it is in this very “offensiveness” found in new lyrical styles within the genre of soca that we can find the potential for both catharsis, popular education and social activism.

Soca performers who, though explicit, exhibit a kind of rebelliousness and resistance with their verbosity would include women such as Denise Belfon and Destra Garcia. Both are free to lyrically express their sexuality in explicit and liberating ways while utilizing their bodies as sites of sexual resistance (Dikobe 2004, 8–14). Through this, they are carrying

on the legacy of female calypsonians such as Calypso Rose who in the 1960s was dubbed the “Queen of Smut” and who often “celebrated female appetite and mocked male sexual inadequacy” (Rohlehr 2004, 362). Male soca artists such as Bunji Garlin also carry on the tradition of the male calypsonian who brags of sexual prowess; however, Garlin garners a tremendous amount of respect among his audiences because he “tells it like it is”, that is, he is explicit not only in terms of celebrating sexuality, but also because he addresses themes of sexual abuse, as well as describes the harshness of ghetto life — the daily reality for an increasingly large number of Trinbagonian, Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic youth — in songs, for example, such as “We From de Ghetto”. Garlin, along with a few other contemporary soca artists such as Maximus Dan, is not afraid to address themes of sexual violence and the commodification of sexuality, that is, the rising number of young women and men who are willing to sell their bodies (“lend out your hole”) in order to receive or purchase the *de rigueur* items of youth cache: bling, designer clothes and shoes, cars with chrome rims, cellphones, and assorted accessories, the proverbial “piece of gold” which Garlin sings about in “Dignity”. These more explicit lyrics reflect a harsher more explicit reality for young people in the Caribbean and its diaspora. Garlin, it appears, is indeed carrying on the calypso torch of social commentary, despite what many critics of soca may say, about soca being simply “party music”, devoid of lyrical relevance. In a critique of newly emerging soca music, calypsonian Chalkdust (Hollis Liverpool) sang in 1978 as follows:

...if you are concerned about your roots
 Anxious to pass on truths to the young shoots, dem youths
 And learn the struggle of West Indian evil
 If so, yuh got to sing calypso (Dudley 1996, 285)

Despite this attitude, it seems evident that artists like Garlin are more than prepared to “pass on truths” albeit through sexually explicit lyrics that may at first glance seem unusual or disrespectful to an older generation of calypsophiles.

Artists like Bunji Garlin are reflective of a new (relatively speaking) genre of soca — ragga (dancehall or reggae) soca — that is heavily influenced by Jamaican dancehall music. Dancehall music is, according to filmmaker Isaac Julien in his documentary *The Darker Side of Black*, a product of a post-Bob Marley/democratic socialist/“One Love” Jamaica, an IMF structural adjustment policy nightmare:

In the dancehall, the possibility of changing the world has become unthinkable. This is the soundtrack of Jamaican reggae’s retreat into exclusively local concerns. The body is being celebrated because the body is the only place where the powerless can exercise their power in a world indifferent to their sufferings. The music sounds different too — drums and bass have had to fight to retain their traditional authority amidst technological innovations which have lowered the value of instrumental skill, and placed dj’s and rappers in command (1993).

According to Gordon Rohlehr, the influence of Jamaican “reggae/dub/dancehall” on calypso music was an “unmasking” in which “sex was unequivocally represented as sex and violence as violence” resulting in a “plainer, less subtle and at times almost witless hybrid that has dominated the airwaves from the mid-1980’s to the 1990’s” (2004, 375). Although I would tend to agree with Rohlehr’s analysis regarding the overall crop of these “hybrid” offerings, I am also interested in artists such as Garlin who seem to be attempting to combine classical components of calypso with traditional dancehall styles in a more lyrically creative way. For example, some of the components of dancehall music that we see in soca music are a desire to speak to “the massive”, that is, lyrically speaking, dancehall music is aimed towards a particular constituency: the most disenfranchised element of society. It is not meant for a global audience, nor is it meant for the local elites. The language used in Jamaican dancehall is also deemed offensive by middle- and upper-class Jamaicans. As Annie Paul states in the following:

It is clear then that there are varieties of creole speech, behaviour, and culture that lost their stigma over time, allowing assimilation into the largely middle-class nationalist modern and national culture of these islands. There are other forms of creolized cultural expression, however, that remain unassimilable, beyond the pale, attracting the contempt and reprobation of so-called polite society, which often responds with censorship or other repressive action (2003, 119).

Garlin started off as a dancehall performer in Trinidad, and his lyrical phrasing is very indicative of this. The directness of his lyrics is also reflective of the dancehall influence, as is his adoption of a (partial) Jamaican accent and Jamaican terms. In 1999, when he first emerged on the scene, he said “Ragga soca is singing soca with a li’l bit of a Jamaican accent, but with a soca melody like what I sing”(Caliste 1999, 2). What is interesting, though, is that Garlin combines both the bluntness of dancehall’s description of ghetto life with the calypso tradition of social commentary, and frames it within soca beats that are popular with youth in and out of Carnival season. In terms of sexuality, Garlin has, unlike other soca performers, been unafraid to address issues of rape, child abuse, prostitution and pornography, not only in relation to the abuse of women but also to the abuse of men. In this way, he addresses both sex and violence, and sex as violence, in ways that are harsh, yes, but unfortunately are perhaps reflecting a new reality that, in the tradition of true calypso-as-social-commentary, simply cannot be ignored. This, I feel, is what is especially pertinent and useful about his lyrics, particularly regarding topics which are devastating to many yet strangely silenced within the society. Part of the cathartic potential I am talking about here is simply the *refusal to silence* horrific acts of child abuse and other forms of violence and abuse occurring in the nation. Parents, teachers, courts and politicians are quick to silence, and even to punish, victims. For example, in Caribbean societies, despite the passing of several laws against domestic violence, we still see a pattern of women being punished by the courts rather than defended (Robinson 2000). The role of popular culture is in exposing the social realities of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and especially incest — perhaps the biggest silence of all. This is the first step in addressing the problem.

Exposing the problem, however, creates a secondary problem — that taboo topics of sexuality may simply fall into the realm of “shock” lyrics, a novelty, titillation, rather than being taken up in a serious way. I think the potential for real social change through the use of popular cultural forms such as soca and calypso lies to a certain extent with the artists themselves. For example, are the artists addressing this topic to sell more CDs? To gain greater radio airplay? Have they themselves commodified the issue? Or are they socially conscious citizens who are committed, perhaps in more ways than onstage, to addressing societal problems? We are seeing greater evidence of the potential for pop cult icons to elicit social activism, even if only of a superficial and temporary nature. International attention to issues such as Darfur and global warming have largely been popularised through the work of mega international pop music artists such as Bono and Sting. If Trinbagonian consumers of soca and calypso music are in any way influenced by what they see going on in international popular culture arenas (which I would argue, they are), they are certainly open to the messages coming from “one of their own” to get conscious and get involved and speak up/out.

If we know that there are rising rates of child and adolescent sexual abuse in Trinidad and Tobago, then we can also assume that a number of soca aficionados and youth who attend soca fetes have been personally affected by this grim reality. There is an underlying rage that many survivors of abuse experience, and this rage can either be turned outwards (resulting in violence and aggression) or inwards (resulting in depression and suicidal tendencies) (Caputi 2003; Ray 2001). Calypso and soca artists such as Singing Sandra and Bunji Garlin have tapped into this rage and expressed it lyrically by describing what they themselves would do to perpetrators of sexual abuse. In so doing, they are also inviting their audiences, many of whom may well be survivors of rape and incest themselves, to unleash a repressed rage which may otherwise have no outlet. In Singing Sandra’s song “Equalizer”, deeply disturbing and often silenced issues of rape, incest and vigilante justice are addressed. The song is sung in the slow tempo of a social commentary calypso, and was not generally heard in the soca fetes of Carnival 1998. It, therefore, lacked an extensive exposure to youth, most of whom attend the more up-tempo soca fetes. It was, however, included in a soca compilation from that year, *The Soca Switch*, produced by well-known DJ, producer, soca performer and dancehall aficionado Chinese Laundry (Anthony Chow Lin On), a DJ who is extremely popular with youth; through this medium the song would have reached a larger, and more international, audience of people.

The song opens with a description of an incident that occurred in 1997 at the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI).

man get so callous man get so cold
 no remorse no humanity
 they moving brassways they moving bold
 imagine they light in UWI
 this little black gyul listen to Gypsy
 she went up dey to study
 she get rape instead

that dread!
 She thought she woulda find de key
 but is a Pandora box of misery
 some might even say she better off dead (Singing Sandra 1998)

Sandra then goes on to describe the vigilante justice which must be enacted on the perpetrator:

but when they hold that son of a Satan
 don't tell me bout no Constitution
 with me he don't have a prayer
 hang him high in Woodford Square
 tie he drawers around he neck
 leave it for corbeaux to peck
 all who find that harsh them too civilize
 ah come out to equalize
 me ent had no time to philosophize
 ah come out to equalize
 send he brain to doctor to analyze - not me!
 The equalizer, the equalizer
 Equal rights equal pain that is my franchise
 Ah come out to equalize (Singing Sandra 1998)

Although "Equalizer" was written by a man (Christophe Grant), it clearly touched the pulse of many Trinbagonian women who were fed up with increasingly violent and brutal crimes against the female population, and a seeming lack of response by (male) authorities — police, judges, and politicians. Such nonchalance on the part of the powers-that-be has been documented in the works of scholars such as Patricia Mohammed (1991) and Tracy S. Robinson (2000), among others. Sandra also addresses the issue of incest, suggesting similarly gruesome remedies for perpetrators:

All dem faddas who like to rape
 dem dog - committin incest
 from my wrath there is no escape
 you just raise the hornet's nest
 when you stoop so low to molest your daughter
 no amount a holy water
 could ever save you now - no how
 is more than just flesh you bust
 you destroy that young girl's trust
 ah go stamp 666 on your brow

all ah dem abusing they daughter
 put them with a horny gorilla
 they can't control they appetite?
 More than the lion go roar tonight

they won't stop their bacchanal
 let King Kong roam their root canal
 them who like to threaten and terrorize
 them wolf in sheep clothing in disguise
 whether we castrate or desensitize
 ah come out to equalize (Singing Sandra 1998)

The explicitness of these lyrics conveys a sense of outrage and justifiable anger. There is no room here for apologies, finding Christ or rehabilitation — the song calls for direct action. I would like to juxtapose this lyrical approach to the topic of incest with a 2007 “conscious dancehall” offering out of Jamaica, a song by Queen Ifrica, entitled “Daddy”:

Daddy don't touch mi there
 I'm going to tell on you one day I swear
 Can't you see I'm scared
 You suppose to be ma father

...Oh sometimes a wanna die feel like no one cares for me and it's evident
 That something must be wrong with me
 I'm not as happy as I seem to be
 The long showers I take don't wash away the memories...

...Get suicidal if you tink it ago save yuh
 Because me sure seh yuh naah go get fi see de savior
 Mi just cyaah fine a name fuh yuh behaviour
 Is a lucky ting wi got a nosy neighbor...
 When yuh feel like giving up
 Jus shake it off and live it up
 Di most high will deliver you
 ...Tribulations a jus fi mek yuh stronger...

The tone of passivity in “Daddy” is evident on many levels, especially seeing as the narrative is mainly from the child's perspective. This is a cry of helplessness, of “bearing one's chafe” and of waiting on divine intervention (including the “nosy neighbour”). There is no agency evident here on the part of victims of abuse, there is no reference to anyone in this child's life to whom she can turn for safety, only “di most high”. Another segment of the song chastises those mothers who do not report incest and lays blame and the retribution of “karma” there as well. The overtones of fundamentalist Christianity are clearly at play here, reflective of its strong influence on Jamaican society overall. The difference between an offering like “Equalizer” and “Daddy” is the difference between the right to express anger and a sense of injustice and to act on it, and the position of too many Caribbean women and children, that of helpless and silent/silenced victims with no recourse for their sufferings save religion.

An example of agency and cathartic release for survivors of sexual abuse is Bunji Garlin's “Licks” (2001), a song about rape that also provides instructions on how to enact

vigilante justice on rapists. It is a high energy, extremely fast ragga soca song, and therefore would have had a much greater exposure to youths in the soca fetes than “Equalizer”:

some men love to rape gyal
walk round de town and boast
some want to rape, take iron gate
we go tie them up on a post
if yuh want to rape gyal
well yuh in for heavy load
we go take a gun put it in your bottom pull the trigger and let it explode

Some man love to rape gyal
Thinking this thing is a game
Five men want to team up on a gyal and she bawling Jesus Christ name
So we take a tin uh condensed milk
Throw on dey private frame
Tie them in a yard
With ninety-nine pit bull
Now they can’t rape again (Garlin 2001)

Like “Equalizer”, Garlin is advocating for both castration and (anal) rape as a form of retribution for sexual assault (including in this case a depiction of gang rape). Garlin also feels, like Singing Sandra, that the police are ineffective in dealing with such cases, and that he needs to step in:

Some of them want to rape
And they thinkin this thing is kicks
So me bar the police station straight and me counsel them boy with licks
Tie them in a bonfire
In the fire me juk out sticks
Then me hold them like Jesus Christ of Nazareth
And me get crucifix
and tell them
yuh want to rape? (Garlin 2001)

Garlin combines the image of child sex abusers, including those who commit incest, with bestiality, lumping such degenerates into one camp all deserving of the same fate — “licks” or beatings.

Take this!
Child molesters
Licks!
Touch your daughter breast
Licks!

Fellas tell me how
 Licks!
 A man could rape a cow?
 Licks!
 Some a dem go beef
 pick up little boys and sheep
 Some uh dem go float
 And dem run off with the goat (Garlin 2001)

What is really interesting about this song is that, true to the genre of party, jump-up soca, Garlin does indeed instruct his audience to “jump up”, but with an interesting twist:

If you agree put your hand inna de air
 Hands up, hands up (licks!) Hands up, hands up (licks!)
 Put the rapist hand under your foot now
 Jump up, jump up (licks!) Jump up, jump up (licks!)... (Garlin 2001).

Garlin not only wants his audience to jump up and put their hand in the air, but also to participate in an imaginary, and one can only assume, cathartic act of vigilante justice themselves. Giving his audience, primarily youth, the opportunity to vent their own rage at injustices which may have been perpetrated against themselves or someone they love, by telling them to “put the rapist hand under your foot”, is an example of empathy between Garlin and his audiences. The fact that Garlin is so popular among young Caribbean people, and that people at his shows really do know the lyrics to the songs, many singing along with him word-for-word, testify to a rapport between artists and audience that has been mentioned in several articles about Garlin in which he is referred to as “the people’s champion” (Telesford 2004; Flemming 2003).

The significance of the power of artists like Bunji Garlin and Singing Sandra should not be underestimated. The fact that they are willing to tackle issues that many other performers avoid in a crucial and critical time, when the nation’s youth are in crisis, is admirable. If many Caribbean youth today are suffering from woundedness related to abuse, neglect, poverty and, to paraphrase cultural critic Cornel West, an increasing sense of hopelessness and lovelessness; if more and more youth are turning to avenues of instant gratification “by any means necessary” in an addictive way to avoid their pain; if many youth are objectifying themselves due to a history of abuse, what role can and does popular culture play in this? I have argued that the role of the soca/calypso artist can and does play a crucial role in the lives of young Trinbagonians. The potential exists for these artists to either elicit a social consciousness in their audience, one that can lead to activism, or conversely, to milk the shock tactic of taboo sexualities as a way to garner an audience. Soca and calypso artists, themselves Caribbean people, are also competing with the often overwhelming amount of images and messages from North America, via the plethora of music videos screened on television stations such as BET. Many of these music videos enforce the idea that if you feel worthless, then sex, money, material goods and drugs are the answer to your despair. Messages found in music videos, particularly rap and hip hop, which are routinely consumed by children and youth in Trinidad and

Tobago, also disseminate gender- and race-specific sexual scripts, normalize these scripts, and produce expectations of behaviours connected to these scripts. In one study of children, African-American female sexual scripts such as the Diva, Gold Digger and Freak are clearly found to influence preadolescent conceptualizations of Black female sexuality. Furthermore, these scripts are “embedded within a framework of patriarchy, which includes the accumulation of material wealth and sexual conquest” (Stephens and Few 2007, 60). In another study on the impact of music videos, it was found that rap videos screened on BET depicted a significant amount of racialized violence, that is, violence both perpetrated by and inflicted upon Black bodies, and that this violence was “presented in such a way that it may contribute to the learning of aggression” since “[i]ndividuals are more likely to attend to and identify with characters that are perceived as similar to themselves” (Smith and Boyson 2002, 77).

Because foreign images and media are so powerful and continue to have an impact on Caribbean youth, and because Caribbean people come out of a damaging history of colonialism, neocolonialism and cultural imperialism, it is equally important that an alternative to these images be presented. If an organic, that is from the soil, artist such as Bunji Garlin can speak directly to youth, gain a considerable following and counter these negative messages, then perhaps such a national resource should be supported. Similarly, proactive youth who are following suit in the vein of public education (such as the students who took on the task of educating their peers around the issue of incest, feeling that adults had failed to do so) should also be more supported and rewarded. One young Canadian-Trinidadian woman, Tanya Baker, after an eye-opening trip to Tobago, advocated as follows:

Since returning to Canada, I have had a lot of time to think about this devastating health situation in Tobago. I have been asking myself what [is] the best way to send a positive message about self-respect and sexual responsibility to the young women of Trinidad and Tobago. My conclusion is that the best means is through music (Baker 2001).

Although Baker focuses solely on the plight of young women, she makes some important points:

Calypso, a type of Trinidadian music, was born as political commentary that could be passed along because few people could read or write. Music has always been an excellent form of communication and I think now, more than ever, we need to use it to reach the younger population. Music is well respected and appreciated by young people; it can send positive and reinforcing messages that, if enjoyed, will be listened to repeatedly. CDs and tapes are cheap and easy to reproduce in large quantities and easy to distribute throughout the country. Although traditional Caribbean music such as reggae from Jamaica has called for an end to many social injustices, it has largely ignored the female population and their issues. The most beneficial plan to reduce

the spread of AIDS would be to produce a recording of local, prominent female artists singing about AIDS, sexuality, respect, relationships, etcetera. The recording would be distributed freely to the young population and the covers would have local information regarding where they could get help, contraception and testing (Baker 2001).

What this young woman's statement clearly advocates is youth communicating with and on behalf of youth. Perhaps the best way to repair the damage that has been done to the youths of Trinidad and Tobago is to support forms of peer support and counselling, as well as creative avenues of catharsis and self-expression, like music and other popular cultural forms. Because of the damage that has been done to many youths at the hands of adults, there is a serious issue of trust that needs to be addressed. "Who feels it knows it" may really ring true in this case. Instead of dismissal and critique, new genres of soca could be viewed as potential healing tools, even if only cathartically.

Conclusions

Previous and ongoing research have clearly delineated linkages between childhood abuse, negative physical, emotional and mental aftermaths, and the danger of survivors falling into high-risk and self-destructive behaviours. Current data and statistics out of Trinidad and Tobago report a high rate of child abuse in the society. Popular musical forms reflect this reality to a certain extent, but can also perpetuate the sexualization and commodification of Caribbean bodies. While I have demonstrated the ways in which soca music can act as a form of catharsis and potentially as a healing tool for traumatized youth in Trinidad and Tobago, I also argue that other musical genres popular with youth can feed addictions to materialism and consumerism, ultimately resulting in nihilism and self-destructiveness. Clearly, this is an area which requires further research, attention and reflection, as the impact on individual human lives is substantial, notwithstanding the overall costs to a society. If we as Caribbean people have internalized our own historical and generational traumas, if we are perpetuating our own self-destruction, this must be addressed, not only in the realm of popular culture, but through scholarship, public policy and direct action.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Transactional sex, according to Kempadoo (2004), refers to “sexual-economic relationships and exchanges where gifts are given in exchange for sex, multiple partnerships may be maintained, and an up-front monetary transaction does not necessarily take place” (42).

ⁱⁱ By sexuality I am referring to the wide range of human behaviours and expressions including “norms, identity and performance” (Mathews and Beaman 2007), and sexual scripts which are socially constructed. Studies of sexuality would also entail the study of sexual violence and the interrelationship between sex and power, as discussed at length by authors such as Foucault.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Trinbagonian”: a contraction of Trinidadian and Tobagonian.

^{iv} According to Stephens and Few (2007), sexual scripts are “schema used to categorize norms regarding appropriate sexual beliefs and behaviours” (49).

^v I am referring here to the 2006 cases of four-year-old Amy Emily Annamunthodo, who was allegedly raped, sodomized and murdered by her stepfather, and six-year-old Sean Luke, who was allegedly sodomized with a cane stalk and murdered by two teenage acquaintances. Another incident which drew considerable public attention in 2005 was the prostituting of a nine-year-old girl by a relative to support his drug habit.

vi. Interestingly, despite the prevalence of HIV infection in the nation, the topic is still very much under-represented in soca music. For a further discussion on the theme of AIDS in calypso, see Best (2004).

^{vii} “Blues” i.e. pornographic films.

viii. Gordon Rohlehr (2004) has noted some references to besituality, buggery and sadistic anal rape in early calypso (389).

Another example which alludes to suspected paedophilia by, of all persons, Santa Claus, in “A Santa Claus Ent Have No Wife” (calypsonian unknown):

Santa Claus de children’s man

Known from creation

Very generous to kids

Every Christmas occasion

But I am getting skeptical

About Santa Claus

I am watching my girl child

You’d better watch yours

You could lock your door

Santa gettin in for sure

He does pass easy

Through creases and the chimney

when you think that your girl child very safe

No - is danger ahead

Your house ent leakin - rain ent fall

So is Santa wet down your bed

Santa Claus ent have no wife

He livin a lonely life.

— (Author unknown; lyrics transcribed from radio broadcast)

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Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Caribbean Literary Field: Crossing Boundaries in Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*

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Abstract

In his 1996 article “Enduring Substances, Trying Theories”, Sidney Mintz returned to a theme that has been central to his work on the Caribbean, that of the region’s fundamental and historically specific modernity. Discussing the rise of the plantation system from the sixteenth century onwards and the importation of enslaved and indentured labour, he observes as follows:

The enterprises for which these people were carried across oceans were intimately associated with Europe and its growth. Their development was an instance of precocious modernity, an unanticipated (indeed unnoticed) modernity — unnoticed especially, perhaps, because it was happening to people most of whom were forcibly stolen from the worlds outside the West. No one imagined that such people would become “modern” — since there was no such thing; no one recognised that the raw, outpost societies into which such people were thrust might become the first of their kind. (1996, 298)

Underlying this “precocious modernity” was the complex agro-industrial character of the plantation, its unity of field and factory and the application of technical features in

operations that predated the Industrial Revolution (Mintz 1996, 295).¹ Equally important, though, was the impact this economic organisation had on the labour force. For Mintz, the particular form of socialisation occasioned by conditions on the plantation imposed a modern cast on those shoehorned into its structures. The stripping of kinship and community, the extirpation of familial matrices, the forced transportation and resettlement alongside culturally unlike peoples — all this constituted a form of brutality that, while underwritten by the seemingly pre-capitalist institution of slavery, in fact reflected the harsh exigencies of modern capitalist industrialisation. And as the enslaved, the indentured, and later the free sought to resist such pressures and reassemble in the Caribbean those traditions they had preserved in conjunction with those they had been newly exposed to, they built ways of life that were both unique and paradigmatically modern

¹ Throughout his work, Mintz has reiterated this view that Caribbean peoples were the first modernised peoples in world history (see also Mintz 1974, 1993). See too David Scott's thorough discussion of Mintz's perspective in "Modernity that Predated the Modern" (2004).

Introduction

A number of important implications follow from Mintz's line of argument. Modernity is here defined centrally by the process of capitalist industrialisation. But the emphasis on the "precocious modernity" of the Caribbean underscores that this is not a reiteration of the (Eurocentric) view of modernisation as identical with Westernisation. Indeed, Mintz's reasoning rests on a challenge to that notion of capitalism and modernity as essentially "Western" phenomena that have their telos in that quasi-geographical area, a telos subsequently exported elsewhere as part of the continuous expansion of capital.² Rather, the emergence of capitalism is seen from the start as the emergence of a capitalist world system and of a modern global history, within which particular responses and formations take shape. The accent, then, is on the discontinuity of capital and its differential effects. On this view, capitalist modernity, as Neil Lazarus puts it, "is characterised by unevenness: that is, by the dynamics of development and underdevelopment, aut centrality and dependency, the production and entrenchment of localisms (to a point approaching irreducibility) within larger processes of globalisation, incorporation, and homogenisation" (1999, 25). The historical circumstances of the Caribbean bear out this perspective, not only in terms of the integrality of the plantation economies to the expansion of capitalism in Europe, but also precisely in relation to the region's precociously modern stamp.³ For this last serves to emphasise how, far from pursuing a model of modernisation pioneered in the "West" and behind which it lagged, the Caribbean was negotiating its own distinctive experience of modernity, one that saw precipitately modern forms emerge in tandem with underdevelopment.

I begin with these comments on modernity since its articulation in the region is inextricable from the particular shape assumed by the Caribbean's cultural and literary fields. In this article I intend to explore how this relationship has been registered at the level of literary form through an analysis of Erna Brodber's 1980 novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*. In its juxtaposition of narrative modes, its evocation of Afro-Caribbean religious and ritual practice, and the attention it draws to the social significance of the body, especially the female body, Brodber's text highlights how the singular shape of the Caribbean cultural field has influenced the representation and interrogation of the region's colonial past and post-colonial present. However, her work also challenges the way in which the theorisation of this cultural field has tended to reproduce the gender blindness that characterised many of the debates of the 1960s and '70s over decolonization and nationhood. Attempts by writers and critics in this period to establish the contours of a cultural nationalism that would complement political independence saw issues of gender marginalized, with feminism often regarded as secondary to or even a distraction from the nationalist project. In *Jane and Louisa*,

² I use the term "quasi-geographical" here to emphasise the ill-defined and ideologically loaded nature of the category of the 'West.' On those perspectives that assume the history of capitalist modernity in the 'West' corresponds to the telos of modernity as such, and the problems with this position, see Lazarus (1999, 16–29).

³ Mintz has discussed this connection between industrialisation in Europe and the plantation economies of the 'New World' in explicitly world-systems terms (see Mintz 1977).

Brodber not only underlines the necessary centrality of the struggle for women's rights to the struggle for nationhood, but also highlights the limitations of any attempt to articulate the historical experience of modernity, or to refashion its legacies, that forgoes a critique of gender relations.

If the Caribbean's modernity was precocious, as Mintz claims, then it was also violent and explosive — an “irruption into modernity” in the words of Édouard Glissant (1989, 100). Although Glissant is referring specifically here to the literary sphere, and to the emergence of a national literature with decolonization (a point I will return to later), his characterisation could just as well apply to the impact of the region's conquest and its integration into the capitalist world system. Indeed, he talks also of the Caribbean's “lived modernity,” defining lived as “that which is abruptly imposed” (1989, 148). Certainly this reflects the socioeconomic development of the area following colonization, its subjection to the brutal imposition of — and disjunctive transitions between — externally oriented economic models. However, not only did the demands of the metropolitan core — its appetite for commodities, its thirst for primitive accumulation — push the colony towards the precipitate semi-industrialisation Mintz identifies; these same demands also had a countervailing effect: they required that the colony be locked into a state of underdevelopment as the condition for its being the pedestal for development elsewhere.⁴ Nothing illustrates this better than that seemingly contradictory circumstance of slavery existing within capitalistic agro-industrial enterprises, an overlap of realities exacerbated by extreme internal uneven development resulting from the grossly lopsided concentrations of wealth produced by the plantation system.⁵

The resistance undertaken by Caribbean peoples to the dominant socioeconomic order further complicates this picture. Across the region, the establishment of peasantries — albeit at different times and in varying contexts — has been a common means by which communities have sought to secure some level of independence. Of significance, however, is Mintz's well known description of such peasantries as “reconstituted”, a term used to emphasise the fact of their “having begun other than as peasants — in slavery, as deserters or runaways, as plantation labourers, or whatever — and becoming peasants in some kind of resistant response to an externally imposed regimen” (1974, 132). Thus these peasantries were formed as a way to negotiate the pressures of industrialisation and modernity, rather than being gradually superseded — as happened in Europe — as commodity capitalism expanded. Indeed, the Caribbean peasantries were not absolutely disjoined from the colonial economy: in many instances peasants would take up part-time work on the plantations and produce goods for sale in local markets.⁶ A complex coexistence of realities is again evident, therefore, with certain social forms and practices

⁴ For a classic account of the development of underdevelopment, see Rodney (1972) and Frank (1967).

⁵ On this issue of the apparently contradictory situation of slave-labour systems existing within a capitalist mode of production, see Mintz (1977). From a global perspective this contradiction is precisely one in appearance only since the coerced systems of labour found in the periphery were not self-contained entities but rather underwritten by the capitalist mode of production that structured the world economy.

⁶ On these points see Mintz (1974) and Holt (1992).

retained or reconstituted to provide a means of survival for the poor and the otherwise dispossessed.

Even as the plantations declined and the economic focus shifted, this situation persisted in various Caribbean countries throughout the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century. In the Anglophone Caribbean in the 1950s, for example, increased migration to urban areas and investment from the colonial centre led to the expansion and development of a number of cities (Cross 1979, 112). However, the surrounding rural areas continued to support alternative modes of subsistence. This was especially the case in those states such as Trinidad where the influx of indentured labourers had resulted in the formation of large Indian peasantries. Such was the background for the work of many of the authors emerging in the Anglophone Caribbean from the mid-twentieth century onwards as they sought — in the context of decolonization and independence — to articulate the reality of the West Indian experience. In his 1978 article “The Folk in Caribbean Literature”, Gordon Rohlehr suggested that the problem for West Indian literature was “one of understanding and expressing the flow between rural ‘folk’ sensibility and experiences of semi- or total urbanisation” (28). Commenting on George Lamming’s emphasis on the peasant theme as integral to the West Indian novel, he noted that a “more pliable theory is required, one which can accommodate the interplay between country, town and big city, between peasant, artisan and city-slicker or factory worker, and between the ill-defined classes of the West Indies” (1978, 28).

In a different context — that of post-1945 Martinique, where the island’s status as a French *département* has led to the even greater overdetermination of its socioeconomic structures — it is just this situation Patrick Chamoiseau captures in his epic novel *Texaco*. Here the modernised city-centre of Fort-de-France, with its French-subsidised service economy, overlaps with the rural peasant sensibility and means of survival retained in the outlying slums. The city is thus said to comprise two spaces: one is the “centre living on the new demands of consumption” and the other is the “suburban crowns of grassroots occupations, rich with the depth of our stories”. In the former, all “dissolves in the modern world”, in the latter, “people bring very old roots, not deep and rigid, but diffuse, profuse, spread over time” (Chamoiseau 1997, 170).⁷ This coexistence of realities is not only described in the text, however; it is also registered at the level of form, allowing us to discern the impress of the relationship between the literary field and the fields of politics, economics, and other areas of social life.

At this point I should emphasise that I use the term “field” specifically in the sense of the concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, the field is the structured space of

⁷ Chamoiseau draws on the work of urban geographer Serge Letchimy in his portrait of urbanisation and migration in Martinique. Letchimy has investigated the emergence of coexistent social orders in and around the city. He explains how in Fort-de-France, during the first post-war wave of rural-urban migration, the need to establish a means of survival meant that “in the course of the first years of settlement, the [migrant] families rediscovered the countryside (or almost) . . . Consequently, life in the quarter [the settlements that comprised the main residential areas around the centre], between 1958 and 1968, was organised on the model provided by the country peasant, on spaces that made reference to the material world” (My translation. Letchimy 1992, 60).

a particular domain (be it the political, educational, cultural and so on) in which there exists a series of possible positions occupied by “agents” or “products” (including cultural products like the novel) whose relations structure the shape of that field. These relations are determined by the amount of capital — not only economic but also cultural, social or other types of symbolic capital — agents possess. The fields are structurally homologous but not identical. Each is relatively autonomous and cannot be reduced in crudely deterministic fashion to, say, economics: changes in one field are not directly reflected in another but rather played out in accordance with the laws of functioning of that other field. Thus, in discussing the literary field, Bourdieu argues that the “important fact, for the interpretation of works, is that this autonomous social universe functions somewhat like a prism which refracts external determinations: demographic, economic or political events are always retranslated according to the specific logic of the field, and it is by this intermediary that they act on the logic of the development of the work” (1993, 164).

With this in mind we can not only return to *Texaco*’s portrayal of Martinican social reality, but also look to *Jane and Louisa* and Brodber’s narrative strategy in depicting the Jamaican context. In Chamoiseau’s novel, the subject matter — the coexistence of the late capitalist structures of the city-centre with the peasant occupations on the outskirts — is refracted through the literary field in being incorporated into the text. Retranslated according to the logic of this field, it now appears in the form of an overlap of literary genres. Thus, in its account of the foundation of *Texaco*, the novel combines elements of Homeric epic with a demystification of this and other founding myths; it evokes creole oral discourses while simultaneously playing on high modernist narrative techniques. Similarly, in *Jane and Louisa* (which sees characters moving between rural and urban areas, as well as between bourgeois households and working-class tenement yards) the narrative exemplifies, as Carolyn Cooper points out, “an interpenetration of scribal and oral literary forms: a modernist, stream-of-consciousness narrative voice holds easy dialogue with the traditional teller of tales, the transmitter of anansi story, proverb, folk song and dance” (1990, 279).

Glissant’s characterisation of the national literatures of decolonizing countries as marked by their “irruption into modernity” provides a useful further perspective on the logic of the literary field in which Chamoiseau’s and Brodber’s texts can be situated. The liberation and decolonization movements have “allowed peoples who yesterday inhabited the hidden side of the earth . . . to assert themselves in the face of a total world culture” (Glissant 1989, 99). The context in which this self-assertion takes place — a context that is itself the product of imperialism and the combined and uneven development that typifies the capitalist world system, the context of a “total world culture” — is, however, an overdetermined one. For these emerging national literatures confront a series of literary and cultural forms — both imported genres and indigenous styles — all at the same time. They must articulate and affirm the community while simultaneously critiquing the imposed models through which this has been done elsewhere; they must deform and reconstruct traditional styles in order to be able to express the contemporary situation. “The main difficulty facing national literatures today, as they are defined here,”

writes Glissant, “is that they must combine mythification and demystification, this primal innocence with a learned craftiness.” He continues as follows:

The fact is that these literatures do not have the time to develop harmoniously from the collective lyricism of Homer to the mordant scrutiny of Beckett. They must include all at once struggle, aggressiveness, belonging, lucidity, distrust of self, absolute love, contours of the landscape, emptiness of the cities, victories, and confrontations.

“This,” he concludes, “is what I call our irruption into modernity” (1989, 100). Thus, the shape of the Caribbean’s literary field — very different from its European counterpart, which imposes the strict categorisation of forms and their assignment to a particular moment in an extended literary evolution — emphasises the region’s distinctive experience of modernity, refracting its precocity and unevenness. But this, in turn, also renders the structure of the field a means by which such experience can be negotiated. Just as a peasantry was reconstituted within and against the dominant economic order to resist its externally oriented demands, so in the literary field narrative forms are reconstituted and reworked to articulate the community on its own terms.

Yet if Glissant’s formulation provides that “more pliable theory” that Rohlehr argued was necessary for the articulation of Caribbean experience, it nevertheless continues the elision of gender issues evident in the debates of the 1960s and ’70s over cultural production and politics. In the Anglophone Caribbean at that time, many writers and critics — including Rohlehr, Lamming (whose initial theory it was Rohlehr sought to modify), Edward Baugh, and Sylvia Wynter — were engaged in an attempt to map an indigenous Caribbean literary aesthetic and critical practice, seeking to drive forward cultural decolonization as part of the push for radical political change. As Alison Donnell has convincingly shown, such imperatives meant emphasis was placed upon works that were politically engaged and spoke to the social situation, resulting in the production of a literary field which canonised those texts that chimed with the cultural nationalist moment while excluding those less amenable to this agenda (Donnell 2006, 27–43). At the same time, as noted earlier, the foregrounding of nationalist issues led to the marginalization of gender concerns, which were construed as not integral to the national struggle but as something separate to be dealt with later lest they distort the nationalist focus. According to Hilary Beckles, even some “feminist historians were swept along by the compelling tide of a hegemonic male representation of the nationalist project. While their participation in the discourse was guided by considerations of intellectual decolonization and nation-building, they applied brakes to the advancing theoretical critique of patriarchy in order to facilitate the suppression of political dissonance” (1995, 125). What was obscured by this masculinist framework was “the fact that for Caribbean women as historical subjects the struggles of nationalism were always gendered and the struggles of women’s rights were always informed by the politics of race and colonialism” (Donnell 2006, 147). In *Jane and Louisa*, this integral connection between gender politics and national politics is made clear, central as it is to Brodber’s re-visioning of community and nationhood, and to the laying bare of the

shortcomings of those anti-colonial ideologies that perpetuate the patriarchal categorisation of women.

Jane and Louisa describes the protagonist Nellie's attempts to reconstruct her family history and, more generally, to reconnect to her community and society. The novel is framed by lines from the children's ring game alluded to in the title. In the first section, "My Dear Will You Allow Me", the narrative records fragmentary voices and snippets of childhood experience. The second section, "To Waltz With You", is a more chronologically straightforward account of Nellie's involvement in radical politics and her traumatic breakdown. The third and fourth sections, "Into This Beautiful Garden" and "Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home", return to the events and experiences introduced in the first part as Nellie seeks to come to terms with her past. The central image in the text is that of the kumbla, the ambivalent significance of which reveals the complex network of values that — freighted with the legacies of slavery and colonialism, and differing in their impact according to the varying race and class positions of those affected — weigh on the bodies of the novel's female characters. Described as a "round seamless calabash that protects you without caring" (Brodber 1980, 123), the kumbla represents the strategies by which women shield themselves against such pressures. At the same time, however, it signifies the detrimental impact these strategies can have on the body and self they encase: "[T]he trouble with the kumbla is the getting out of the kumbla. . . . If you dwell too long in it, it makes you delicate. Makes you albino: skin white but not by genes" (130).

The ambivalence of this potentially damaging form of protection can be traced back to the status of the black female body under slavery. As Rhonda Cobham observes in the following passage:

Historically, the Black woman in the New World has always been associated with qualities such as physical strength, sexual independence, and economic resourcefulness. These qualities were imposed on her as part of her status as non-person (and therefore non-woman) during slavery but, like the kumblas of Brodber's vision, the disfigurement functioned dialectically to protect and extend African traditions of female independence and physical prowess. (1993, 52)

Here the protective devices assumed in and against the plantation system do provide resources for survival and a route to self-expression. However, in a testament to the complexity and ambiguity of such identifications, these resources are at equal risk of slipping into a denial of elements of selfhood and of the social background that conditioned them. This is particularly so in certain class contexts where such denial becomes conformity to colonial bourgeois norms. Again, these problems have their roots in the legacies of the physical and ideological violence perpetrated on the plantation, where the colonizer's disgusted fascination with the "transgressive" black female body, born from a mixture of lust and fear, fed into the desire to contain it. This containment — part of a strategy to repress the cultural practices of the enslaved, to negate their rituals, traditions, and material crafts as sites of a resistant history — was passed off

under the guise of the so-called civilising mission (the subordination of bodily impulses by the rational mind having been established in European Enlightenment discourse as the marker of civility). While the invidious nature of this “mission” was soon exposed by the violence of slavery, several of its ideological pillars did persist: the association of “civility” with the repression of the body became entrenched, forming part of a series of homologous binary oppositions that pitched high against low, the refined against the vulgar, the written against the spoken, the masculine against the feminine, and the European against the African.⁸ In this schema, the “vulgar body of knowledge produced by the people . . . is devalued” (Cooper 1993, 8), while the “vulgar” body of the Black woman emerges as an especially overdetermined site of stigmatization.

Jane and Louisa illustrates the way in which these values have saturated the thinking of the Jamaican bourgeoisie depicted in the novel. For this group, the protective device of closing oneself off all too easily becomes a distortion of selfhood determined by colonial norms. The character of Aunt Becca represents just this kind of respectability-through-repression. Her grandmother, Tia Maria, sought to erase her own black body from the family history; and Aunt Becca has continued in this vein: her “shaming eye” rules over the family, on the lookout for any perceived (especially sexual) impropriety. Her strict and censorious manner is reflected in her buttoned-down appearance:

Aunt Becca’s crinkly hair scooped away from her face, stuck out in a point barely touching the top of her shoulder like a fish tail in a trapped hair net. . . . Aunt Becca’s round, brown self, her thin lips pursed together like a shrivelled star apple. Aunt Becca’s fish eyes shamed everyone into unworthiness. (92–93)

However, Aunt Becca’s demeanour indicates also the level of censure she works on herself. The pinched posture of her body emphasises the self-denial that has left her “shrivelled” and desiccated. Indeed, it emerges that such imagery has a literal complement: Aunt Becca has become sterile after aborting a child by Mass Tanny in order to be able to marry the more “respectable” schoolteacher Pinnock.

Nellie too is affected by the pressures that have so ingrained themselves into Aunt Becca’s habitus. Having gone to live with the latter in town, Nellie is shown “where to find and how to wear my kumbla” (142). “Those people,” says Aunt Becca, meaning the poorer classes and men in particular, “will drag you down child. You have to be careful of them” (142). While such advice and the refuge provided by Aunt Becca’s home allow Nellie to concentrate on her education, she becomes alienated from her own body:

So the black womb is a maw. Disinfect its fruits with fine sterilised white lint if you can. You suck a wasp’s sting from a child’s hand, clear its nose of the bluish green blockage and spit. The black womb sucks grief and anger and shame but it does not spit. It absorbs them

⁸ On the wider impact of these homologies, especially as they impact on the black female body, see Cooper (1993), 1–36.

into its body. Take an antidote. Silence it. Best pretend it doesn't exist. Give it a cap of darkness, take a pill (143).

The consequence of such repression and internal self-mutilation is an individual and collective neurosis, the impact of which is registered in Nellie's own eventual breakdown.

Emphasising that any resolution to these problems must be sought on a political and social level, and not just in the domain of individual psychology, Brodber weaves the story of Nellie's traumatic collapse into an account of her involvement with a group committed to a form of radical politics. Although events in the novel are not dated explicitly, the group's enthusiasm for Marxism and Black Power suggests the context is that of the Jamaica of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a tide of radicalism swept over the country in reaction to economic difficulties and disappointment with the post-independence political settlement.⁹ While such radicalism was vital in challenging the status quo, Nellie's group reveal themselves to be just as alienated from the community they seek to represent as Nellie is from her cultural background. Indeed, there is something of the ambivalence of the *kumbla* evident here: the group's ideological debates form a protective vessel around their ideals of change, yet serve too as a barrier to establishing the kind of connection to those in the tenement yard with whom they live that would facilitate this change. Their approach to political radicalism is an abstract, theoretical one that only drives a wedge between themselves and the popular classes:

We have unfortunately to make a distinction between them and us. Those people throw dice, slam dominoes and give-laugh-for-peasoup all day long. . . . They have no culture at all. No interest in helping their leaders keep their heads up high. We get no co-operation from them. How will we ever lead them out in the right and proper way (51).

This denial of the culture of those they claim to lead underscores the failings of the group. The portrayal of their inadequacy can be viewed as a more general critique of those forms of nationalist politics that break the dialectical link to the mass of the people. Their complacent talk of leadership recalls the approach to revolutionary nationalism rebuked by Fanon, for whom the "relationship between 'the masses' and 'intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles' is not to be viewed from the standpoint of elitist assumptions about leaders and led, seekers and followers, shepherds and sheep" (Lazarus 1999, 102). If the new social structures that emerge are to do so out of and in relation to the practices and culture of the "masses", then this

⁹ The late 1960s and early 1970s in Jamaica (as in many other Caribbean countries) was a period of great social unrest and revolutionary upheaval. There were widespread disturbances, particularly in the urban working class area of West Kingston. These were "fanned by the teaching of militant Black Power advocates heavily influenced by the Black Power movement in the United States of America, but also, as a University of the West Indies report noted, by the blending of Marxist analysis and what they termed 'the ideology of Rastafari racism'" (Maingot 2004, 318).

dialectical link is crucial. Only thus will political representation by the “elite” not just be in good faith but point towards the thoroughgoing transformation of society.

However, the group’s failings also point to the limitations of any nationalist project that does not tackle issues of gender and the subordination of women (itself articulated differently across class and colour lines). Nellie begins to grasp this problem after the death of her lover Robin, whose radical fervour causes him to self-combust. She recognises that the group’s very approach to the social world promotes their own disconnection and reification: “Suddenly, it struck me that our path led to desiccation. We were bent on exterminating water . . . Robin had reached our highest phase of evolution: he had become a dried up bird and could only crumble into dust” (53). This emphasis on the dryness and sterility of the group’s politics, as a result of their abstraction from the everyday practices of the wider community, foregrounds the link to that denial of the female body explored earlier in the novel, and in particular to the literal sterility of Aunt Becca. As such, it underscores how the latter’s psychopathological relationship to her body is also a national–political problem: full decolonization must include the decolonization of the psyche, a process inextricable from the dismantling of the patriarchal frameworks imposed upon women. In both the political and personal contexts — in fact inseparable — it is, to borrow Carolyn Cooper’s terminology again, the “vulgar” popular body of the people, and in particular the doubly stigmatized female body, that must be reincorporated to transform that politically abstract or personally ‘respectable’ (and in both cases desiccated) condition. Any project for progressive change, if it is to bear fruit, must be grounded in this revalorised “low” materiality, integrating the reconstruction of gender relations such revalorisation presupposes.

Interestingly, the way in which Brodber’s novel exposes the limitations of a radical politics that fails to take these imperatives into account can also be read as establishing a critique of the literary/critical field of the 1960s and ’70s, a critique effected through the mediation of the wider Caribbean literary field within the text itself. Cobham points out that certain early Jamaican and Trinidadian works of fiction — the barrack-yard stories of the 1930s, for example — feature strong, independent female characters whose “masculine” traits serve to erode gender boundaries. “The existence of such representations,” argues Cobham, “acknowledges the tenacity with which the first generation of Black women after emancipation fought for the right to an independent and emotionally satisfying existence for themselves” (1993, 53). However, she goes on to note their “disappearance from later Caribbean fiction, or their truncation into stereotypes in the work of the nationalist writers of the 1950s and 1960s,” pointing out that this “did not mean they had ceased to exist. Rather it reflects the ambivalence of the emergent Black elite, from whose ranks these writers were drawn, about their connection with a female tradition so at odds with the normative gender roles of their new class” (53). With this in mind, Brodber’s depiction of the failure of Nellie’s radical group to make the necessary connection to the “masses” in the tenement yard, which is bound up with their failure to integrate the “vulgar” female body into their political thinking, could be understood as the translation into the logic of the literary field of that gender blindness which marked many of the literary/critical debates of the 1960s and ’70s. The history of female agency and the struggle for women’s rights (as part of, not separate from, the

struggle against colonialism) is translated into that literary history of strong, independent female characters, a history figured here by the tenement yard — a location that recalls the earlier barrack-yard stories — and its female inhabitants. As textual figures, in other words, the tenement yard and Nellie's group of radical middle-class intellectuals are literary mediations of particular politics of gender. Hence, the failure of Nellie's group to connect to the yard, as the sign for a history of female agency, represents both the occlusion of this history in the work of nationalist writers and critics, and the subsequent gender blindness that characterised the attempt to define the Caribbean cultural field.

The necessity of engaging with such gender issues in order to achieve the progressive transformation of the personal and the political, as well as to rethink the cultural field, is figured by Nellie's reconciliation with the inhabitants of the tenement yard as the prelude to overcoming her psychic fragmentation. Her reintegration into the community (the "vulgar" popular body) is effected via Baba Ruddock, himself one of those "vulgar" boys stigmatized by Aunt Becca when Nellie was young as likely to "drag you down child." When Baba and Nellie meet as adults, she recognises that in contrast to the dried up members of her political group, he "still had oodles of moisture" (68). And it is he who paves the way for her being healed by those in the yard she had previously dismissed as having "no culture at all." As we will see in a moment, central to this healing process is Nellie's coming to terms with her own repressed "vulgar" corporeality. First, however, I want to turn to the way this emphasis on the body as integral to the attempt to reconfigure self and society returns us to the question of literary form and the shape of the Caribbean literary field. More specifically, it raises the issue of how the unique character of the latter underpins the novel's ability to incorporate formally this bodily imperative.

Earlier we saw how the Caribbean literary field, refracting a precocious and uneven modernity, is distinguished by an overlap of genres confronted simultaneously, something manifested in the mix of narrative techniques deployed in Brodber's novel. However, as the earlier references to her use of oral forms might suggest, the uniqueness of this literary field is not confined to its internal structure: the relationship between it and other fields must also be seen differently from similar relationships in the European context. For in the Caribbean, the literary field is not exclusively "literary"; it also contains, or overlaps with, non-canonical or non-literary forms that have historically provided a means of expression in the region, often emerging as a bearer of identity or culture when other outlets have been restricted — most obviously during the time of slavery. These forms of course include the aforementioned oral discourses, storytelling practices and proverbs, as well as musical forms like calypso or *tambor*, and religious practices such as Vodou, Santería, Shango, and Myal, in addition to rituals like Carnival, *damier*, and stickfighting. The Caribbean literary field draws on and is enmeshed in these cultural fields, producing narrative styles informed by the above practices — many of which are practices revolving around bodily movement as a means of communication. This marks a crucial point of difference from the structure of similar fields in Europe. There, a greater separation has been maintained between the spheres, with the literary field often construed as decisively removed from other fields — an idea that reached its apogee with the ideology of the autonomy of the aesthetic in European modernism, which

disavowed any connection between the artwork and other kinds of social life or experience.¹⁰

The key point here, of course, is that such autonomy is itself the result of historical processes, having as its condition of possibility wider changes in the social world. The expansion of capitalism from the sixteenth century onwards meant the increasing rationalisation of society, whereby “the traditional or ‘natural’ [*naturwüchsige*] unities, social forms, human relations, cultural events, even religious systems, are broken up in order to be reconstructed more efficiently in the form of post-natural processes or mechanisms; but in which, at the same time, these now isolated broken bits and pieces of the older unities acquire a certain autonomy of their own” (Jameson 1981, 48). The separation of nature from culture integral to this process of autonomisation was inextricable from the entrenchment of the division between mind and body, with the corporeal now subject to increasing regulation as part of the reprogramming of the individual for insertion into the capitalist economy. These transformations were registered too in the intellectual sphere, the ever more formalised division and ordering of knowledge resulting in the growing autonomisation of the disciplines.¹¹ Likewise, the eighteenth century in Europe saw the development of the concept of literature in its modern form, the consequence in part of a process of specialisation in response to “the socially repressive and intellectually mechanical forms of a new social order: that of capitalism and especially industrial capitalism” (Williams 1977, 50). The nature of this reaction however — the demarcation of ‘literature’ as the “relatively removed but again ‘higher’ dimension” — set the stage for that denial of comparability between a supposedly transcendent literary realm and other levels of social life (Williams 1977, 147). An autonomous sphere of “high” literature had necessarily to position itself against “low” cultural forms and practices, and so by extension against the body, itself categorised as “low” materiality in opposition to the elevated dimension of the mind.

Significantly, the processes driving this autonomisation of areas of social life were inextricable from the colonial project, not only in terms of that economic link between European industrialisation and plantation slavery, but also in relation to the kinds of organisational practices and justificatory ideologies surrounding the latter. Most notably, the regulation and containment of the body in Europe, alongside the reduction of the corporeal to “low” matter, had its extreme and bloody underside revealed in the colonies. Here the veiled institutional coercion behind the production of monadic subjects became the naked violence of slavery, with the discourse of the “civilising mission” its pathetic fig leaf, and the declared need to “tame” the “wild” bodies of the enslaved being but a reflection of the concern to neutralise the potential for resistance and stifle the claims to historical agency carried in the subjects’ cultural practices.

¹⁰ On the ideology of the autonomisation of the aesthetic in European modernity, see Jameson (2002).

¹¹ Indeed, for certain modes of enquiry this was the moment of their emergence as disciplines. On this and the increasing division and ordering of knowledge more generally, see Foucault (2002).

Given the connections between the demands of capital, the autonomisation of levels of social experience (including the more rigorous separation of intellectual disciplines), the containment and regulation of the body in the colonies, and the denial of cultural practice as a denial of historicity, it is possible I believe to see why the overlap and merging of cultural and literary fields might take on a particular significance in the context of the Caribbean's involvement in modernity. Not only does it allow for the expression of the irruptive precocity and uneven development that characterised this involvement; it is also what enables the articulation of alternative models of community and selfhood. Those "low" cultural and corporeal practices, as the repositories of a world view radically different from that promulgated by colonialism, must be incorporated into literary and other intellectual discourses. Only thus can a full sense of the Caribbean past — including the agency of those whose historicity is excluded in colonial/imperial frameworks — be recovered. To uphold the rigid segregation of forms of social and cultural life, and so too of the intellectual disciplines, would be to perpetuate the occlusion of vital areas of historical experience. It is not only the narratives constructed by the colonizer that distort and repress: the partitioning and reification of the fields in which these narratives are located has the same effect also.

It is for this reason that so much work by Caribbean writers looks to exceed disciplinary and conceptual boundaries. Glissant, for example, has argued explicitly for an approach to history that moves beyond the customary understanding of this mode of enquiry. The destructive impact of colonialism and the imposition of a non-history mean that a history other than that narrative of loss and deprivation is not always self-evident. "Because the collective memory was too often wiped out," he contends, "the Caribbean writer must 'dig deep' into this memory, following the latent signs that he has picked up in the everyday world" (1989, 64). These "latent signs" (contained in routine cultural practices, for example) provide a gateway into the submerged consciousness of the community, otherwise imperceptible to conventional historiography. From such traces, that which has seemingly been "wiped out" can be reconstructed. And it is here that history begins to overlap with fiction — itself transformed in the process — as a way to achieve this reconstruction:

As far as we are concerned, history as a consciousness at work and history as lived experience are therefore not the business of historians exclusively. Literature for us will not be divided into genres but will implicate all the perspectives of the human sciences. These inherited categories must not in this matter be an obstacle to a daring new methodology, where it responds to the needs of our situation.

(Glissant 1989, 65).

Brodber herself, in her role as a social anthropologist, has stressed the importance of going beyond the bounds of conventional historiography in order to create a social history of the Caribbean (Brodber 1983). *Jane and Louisa* participates in this project. Originating in another intellectual field, the novel's initial purpose was "to serve as a case study of the dissociative personality for [Brodber's] social work students" (O'Callaghan 1983, 61). This crossing of disciplinary borders not only bears out Glissant's conception

of a literature that “will implicate all the perspectives of the human sciences”, but also emphasises the crucial role the imagination can play in Caribbean historiography. For as O’Callaghan notes, Brodber’s novel can be seen as “a therapeutic exercise, a case-study of sorts, with the therapeutic tool being the process of ‘going back’ to the past” (1983, 61). Engaged in a “digging up” of the collective memory of the community, the narrative — as its use of oral tales and folk traditions indicates — looks to forms of cultural practice to unearth legacies that might otherwise remain overlooked in conventional historiography. By so doing, it is able to enact within itself that which it suggests is required to overcome psychological and political blockages so as to refashion understandings of community and nationhood.

This is illustrated most clearly through the healing process Nellie undergoes in the tenement yard. Significant are the elements of religious and ritual practice associated here with this process. The novel not only shows their importance to the life of the community, but also registers the influence of the religious field formally: the resources and traditions connected to this field provide both a means to unbind Nellie from the once protective integument that now stifles her and a way for the text to narrate the resolution of this contradiction between security and freedom. Nellie’s experiences take the form of a disintegration of the psyche and a descent into madness in which her body is felt precisely as a constrictive husk, one that she begins to scratch at until tearing her skin. Yet her breakdown is also an opportunity to break out of the kumbla; it offers the possibility of being reborn through and into the community, as well as of connecting both to her own “vulgar” corporeality and to that history of female emancipatory agency, the literary mediation of which the tenement yard serves as a figure for. After losing consciousness at the height of her mania, Nellie awakens with a new sense of the people around her, of the texture of life in the yard. Her convalescence “[a]mid the smell of beef soup and ginger tea, the commotion of tipping toes and tired thoughts” (67) becomes a rediscovery of her body and a renewal of her muted sensorium. At the same time, it signals the start of a return to and a re-examination of the past. One of the defining moments of this “physical and spiritual rebirth”, observes Cobham, comes when Nellie ventures into a dance hall and the sounds of the voices and movements of the people around her “merge into a seamless fabric of humanity in which the lines of demarcation between human bodies are no longer of importance” (Cobham 1993: 59). It is after this experience that the novel circles back to those incidents alluded to in the fractured prose of the first section, seeking at last to make sense of their implications.

Given the historical importance of bodily movement as a vital repository of memory, it is clearly significant that it is at the dance hall that Nellie establishes a sensual connection to the community and begins her retrieval of history. On the level of structure, moreover, her path from psychic disintegration to rebirth can be read as patterned on the trajectory marked out in various Afro-Caribbean religious practices. Central to a number of these practices, including Vodou, Santería, and — most pertinently in the context of Jamaica — Myal, is the temporary displacement of an individual’s consciousness as part of the rites of possession, a voiding of the self aimed at opening up a gateway to the spirit world and enabling the manifestation of the ancestors. In Myal, the “ecstatic trance” of possession “allows for the possibility of a direct interaction between ancestral spirits and

the living, who in turn become the spirits' vehicles for prophecy, healing, advice, and revenge" (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2003, 144). Drawing on these resources, *Jane and Louisa* finds a way to organise the painful shards of experience introduced in the first section which mark Nellie and her family's history, but point also to the conditions incubated by uneven development and the pressures and excisions of colonialism.

What I want to suggest, then, is that the novel's form works this ritual practice on its content — on Nellie's experiences. It turns her madness, which significantly sees her become a "public spectacle" (65), into a voiding of consciousness that renders her a vessel through which (like the possessed in Myal) the past is manifested. By way of this rite, Nellie is unbound from the kumbla and reincorporated into the community. But she is also enabled to reconnect to her own and a collective history: the immersion in the past facilitated by ritual, during which "linear time dips down into the reservoir of collective experience and repairs the apparent fissure between then and now" (Spiller qtd. in Juneja 1996, 59), allows Nellie to bring to light the repressed legacies of her childhood and organise them into a coherent structure in which the problems of the present can be made sense of now in relation to the pressures of history. Critically, this means of organising — of coming to terms with — the past pulls that personal world into the communal; it of necessity motivates the working out of conflicts in the social domain rather than re-privatising them in the psychology of the individual (an approach that would perpetuate the enclosure of the self in the shell of the privatised monadic subject instituted by capitalist modernity). As the "public" nature of her breakdown emphasises, Nellie's disintegration and recovery become a restaging for the whole community of the difficulties from which it suffers; the working through of her vexed history entails the simultaneous working through of a vexed collective history.¹² Discussing the displacement of the ego of the *serviteur* during possession rites in Vodou, Maya Deren notes as follows:

In the growing control accomplished by the ordeals and instructions of initiation, and in the prospective vigilance of houngan and *société*, he [the *serviteur*] is reassured that the personal price need not be unpredictable or excessive. In the principle of collective participation is the guarantee that the burden shall, in turn, be distributed and shared (1983, 249–50).

The ritual act reaffirms the dialectical link between the individual and the community: the individual is temporarily "lost" with the voiding of the ego but simultaneously "gained"

¹² The way in which Nellie's madness here becomes a public spectacle that plays out for the community its own vexed history corresponds to Glissant's analysis of routine verbal delirium in Martinican society. Of the four types of delirium he identifies, Glissant highlights that of *théâtralisation* or dramatisation as having a potentially progressive effect since it enables its sufferers to externalise the "torment of history," acting out the repressed conflicts and disjunctions lived by the community (Glissant 1981, 655).

to the community, leading in turn to a renewal of the self through the support of the collective, which is itself strengthened in the process. Something similar underpins *Jane and Louisa*, where Nellie's integration into, and healing by, the tenement yard folk opens the way to the reappraisal and revitalisation of the community.

Thus, the uneven development and overlap of realities that characterises the Caribbean's involvement in modernity — the coexistence of late capitalist structures alongside other forms of social organisation — is here refracted through the “literary” field (itself not purely “literary” in the conventional sense, as we have seen) to be retranslated into an overlap of “formal realities”. The novel form, which (when it emerged as a process of narrative mimesis in an industrialising Europe) had as its “historic function” the “secular ‘decoding’ of those pre-existing inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms that are its initial givens” (Jameson 1981, 138), here coexists with just such sacred paradigms, with narrative patterns derived from forms of religious experience. *Jane and Louisa* works out of this overlap. By integrating into its structure those religio-cultural resources and elements of ritual, the text is able to posit on the level of form the utopian resolution of that contradiction between security of self and freedom amongst others — between protecting the female body and asserting oneself in society. The dialectical relationship between individual and community enacted in ritual practice points to the way in which the kumbla could be shed and yet protection maintained in the shape of the renewed communal body. But this image of utopian resolution indicates also the concrete changes required for its fulfilment. It becomes clear, especially when read against that explicitly political narrative strand concerning the failure of the group of radical intellectuals with whom Nellie is involved, that the “communal body”, by which is meant the devalued “vulgar” body of popular knowledge and experience, must be legitimised and afforded structural viability; and for this to be truly successful, the Black woman must have an equal and independent place within it. Any project aimed at social reconstruction has therefore to establish these “vulgar” bodies as the ground upon which to erect itself. In “literary” terms, *Jane and Louisa* performs this same political manoeuvre: it too draws on such “vulgarity”. Its form incorporates and valorises ritual practice, making this integral to the reassembly of its own fractured “body” — those early fragmented chapters — in the final sections of the novel. As cultural production, then, it crosses into the political field, constructing a form able not only to articulate the complex legacies of colonialism and uneven development, but also to recuperate and reaffirm a history that provides the resources to rethink and reshape the national body politic.

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The University of
the West Indies
Centre for Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

Has Learning Become Taboo and is Risk-taking Compulsory for Caribbean boys? Researching the Relationship between Masculinities, Education and Risk

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Abstract

In recent years, gender dynamics in education in the English-speaking Caribbean have undergone significant shifts. On the one hand, educational access, retention and attainment by girls have improved significantly and should be celebrated. On the other hand, retention, completion and attainment by boys appear to be slipping. To explore this issue we examined the available literature which explores Caribbean masculinities along with preliminary data from our own qualitative research on Caribbean masculinities. As a result of this work new perspectives have emerged that may help to explain boys' changing educational achievements. In the past, academic excellence was largely, if not entirely, a male domain. However, with education increasingly becoming common ground, boys are left with fewer opportunities to establish their gendered identity through education; and academic achievement meets that need less readily. In contrast, fundamental biological differences mean that physicality has been preserved as a way of asserting masculine difference, and the outdoors remain boys' territory. In the Caribbean and elsewhere, outdoors physicality seems to have gained pre-eminent importance for developing a boys' identity. While this retreat to physicality may well benefit boys' participation in sporting achievements and the trades, there are also important negative consequences. Proving their gender identity through physical dominance is increasingly

driving boys towards hard, physical, risk-taking, hyper-masculine and sometimes antisocial acts including bullying, harassment, crime and violence. Meanwhile, boys who do achieve in academic pursuits are at risk of being considered “suspect” by their peers and of becoming the subject of gender taboos. These include boys who show a preference for reading, who regularly report receiving homophobic criticism, perhaps the deepest of all masculine taboos. The research discussed in this paper also sheds light on HIV risk. Through the twin mechanisms of obligation and taboo, a wide range of risks, including sexual risks, has become resiliently embedded in the social fabric and these risks are, as a result, highly resistant to change. We call this phenomenon “social embedding”. Social embedding has its impact by way of gender roles, peer group dynamics, stigma and taboo and socioeconomic factors. To address social embedding and to achieve widespread, sustainable outcomes, strategies for producing grassroots social change with embedded behavioural outcomes will be required.

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed important shifts in educational outcomes in the Commonwealth Caribbean for boys and girls. These shifts are a cause for both celebration and concern. On the positive side, educational outcomes for girls have improved significantly: girls now constitute the majority of secondary school enrolments in the region (Reddock 2004, xv) and girls' school attendance and retention rates exceed those for boys in all age cohorts (Chevannes 1999, 11).

These trends are evident at the tertiary level too. The number of women graduating each year from the University of the West Indies¹ now exceeds the number of men (Figueroa 2004, 141; Reddock 2004, xv). Not surprisingly, this has not always been the case. Between 1948 and 1972, males occupied a sizeable majority (over 60%) of places at the university (Figueroa 2004, 142–143). However, the gender balance has been undergoing change for some years now, so that by 1974 female enrolments at the Jamaican campus passed 50% for the first time and by 1982 they exceeded 50% for all campuses. This trend has continued: by late 1992, 70% of graduates from the Jamaican campus were female (Reddock 2004, xv) and in the most recent intake in 2007, 82% of new enrolments in Jamaica were female.

Of course, these changes might simply reflect a shift in the types of courses offered by the university. Mark Figueroa notes that the gender balance in registrations is not uniform over all disciplines: for example, in Jamaica 54% of law enrolments are female; this figure drops to 33% for agriculture; and 10% for engineering. (Figueroa 2004, 142–143). Nevertheless, it remains the case that subjects that once were pursued mainly by men are no longer so.

While we should rightly celebrate the achievements of Caribbean women, it is also important that we examine what is happening with men. In this regard, there is mounting evidence that the educational status of boys and of young men is not nearly as good: boys' enrolment, retention and completion rates are lower throughout the system. There is little doubt that boys' performance has declined relative to the growing successes of girls, but what remains unclear is whether the data reflect a real decline or a relative one. That is to say, do boys only appear to be slipping relative to girls because girls are now doing so much better, or are boys less likely to reach their potential in real terms when compared to the performance of boys in the past?

Methods

Recent quantitative studies have documented important trends in educational achievements, crime and HIV patterns in the Caribbean region. Of interest to us is that gender appears to lie at the heart of each of these issues — particularly young Caribbean

¹ The University of the West Indies is a keystone university which covers most of the English-speaking Caribbean. It has three main campuses — in Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad. It also has facilities in 12 other Caribbean countries and territories.

masculinities. Our research is designed to extrapolate meaning from these trends and to assist in their interpretation. To do this, we used a dual approach of (i) revisiting the existing body of work of other Caribbean researchers; (ii) undertaking our own qualitative research using interviews and observation.

The reason we chose a qualitative approach is that it is particularly well suited to identifying the meaning behind the trends, for explaining the quantitative data, and for theory building. Our strategy consisted of targeted data collection from young men using a “grounded theory” approach. Interview data from a larger project on Caribbean masculinities were examined. This project involved interviewing young men in their late teens and early twenties about their experiences of gender while they were growing up, particularly in peer groups and at school. To date we have conducted 138 interviews in eight Caribbean countries and territories: Anguilla, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. Purposive sampling was undertaken to identify participants who were in positions that would help to shed light on the quantitative data. As such, our participants did more than simply give an account of their own experiences — they were also used as field observers of complex social systems that they interacted with and which encompass many additional participants (such as villages, communities, schools and peer groups). Thus, using a strategic approach to sampling (known as theoretical sampling) we were able to collect rich and highly relevant data that can be used to explore and map emerging social trends and to interpret those trends and make them intelligible and meaningful.

It should be noted that this paper is the first in a series of papers to come from our own research. As such, the paper primarily consists of a contextual survey of the work of other researchers in the area. However, we have also taken this opportunity to make a preliminary report of our own work in the light of the literature. Additional interviews in other countries are planned for the coming year along with more detailed analyses. Nevertheless, our findings along with cumulative evidence from other researchers is building a compelling case that academic achievement is indeed becoming taboo, at least for some Caribbean boys.

Policing masculinity

The findings confirm that achieving a gendered identity — being able to convincingly project oneself as masculine — takes centre stage for most boys as they mature. There is a sense that boys both aspire to masculine status and that their behaviour is policed to ensure that it conforms to prevailing masculine standards. Central to this policing process is the peer group, which the data reveal to be a formidable force in boys’ lives, particularly during adolescence. In Barry Chevannes’ words, the peer group exercises a “magnetic pull” in the years leading up to puberty (1999, 29). Indeed, our own research reveals that for many teenaged boys the authority of the peer group at least competes with — and frequently exceeds — the authority of any adult in the boys’ lives. In that respect the data corroborate the work of Chevannes who found that the peer group constitutes a powerful controlling force in boys’ lives which competes with and virtually replaces the authority of the boys’ parents (1999, 30).

So while it is popular to blame parents, teachers and the media for boys' adverse social outcomes, more often than not it turns out to be the peer group that exercises the most profound influence on boys' values and behaviour (a factor that we feel is widely underestimated in the research literature and the popular press). As we will see shortly, this peer-group influence has wide-ranging social ramifications for issues ranging from educational achievement through to crime and disease patterns.

Of course peer group influences are not necessarily bad — but they can be, in fact they can be very bad. Bailey and colleagues in Jamaica found that the “worst, most individualistic and predatory aspects of the street” were validated by boys' peers and became the norm for boys (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart 1998, 82). Moreover, the authors' findings (1998, 59) corroborate our own research which found strong linkages between peer groups and gang-related activity — to such an extent that a core research question emerged: at what point does a peer group become a gang?

It seems as if in the absence of sufficient restraint, for example where there is lack of supervision or a “power vacuum”, the male peer group readily fills the void and asserts its authority. Often this occurs on the streets, where the peer group really comes into its own.

But surely these dynamics don't arise spontaneously? These peer groups must source their behaviours from somewhere? Someone must be responsible? Paradoxically, the answer to these questions is both yes and no. Yes, it is the case that the rules of masculinity are comprehensively coded into our cultures and start to impinge on boys soon after birth. Moreover, parents, teachers and adult role models, including women, contribute significantly to setting the standards that boys emulate. For example, Crichlow reports that his mother put him in a “very rigid hyper-male gender prison” (Crichlow 2004, 193), and when he then “acted out” the hard masculinities that were instilled, he won the approval of friends, parents and teachers (including women) because those masculinities demonstrated power and also showed that the young man was not a “buller, sissy or coward” (Crichlow 2004, 201). As you may be aware, the term “buller” is used in Trinidad and Barbados to denote a homosexual (roughly the equivalent of the American term “faggot” or the English term “poofster”). We will return to the significance of these terms shortly.

As for the “no” case concerning the responsibility of some external influence for peer group behaviours, the research found that young men are not simply cultural sponges: the peer groups actively create, fashion and transmit dominant masculinity. According to Chevannes (1999, 30), peers socialise one another, they transmit the group's cultural knowledge to each other and they actively manufacture their own values and meanings. This phenomenon (of transmitting peer group codes down through generations of schoolboys) is referred to elsewhere as “rolling peer pressure” (Plummer 2005, 226). Rolling peer pressure identifies a mechanism that explains how the cultures of boys and young men can be semi-autonomous and can effectively take on a life of their own. Codes and standards are continually passed down the chain from older to younger boys, frequently at arm's length from adults. As a result, peer groups have a culture-generating

role that, on reflection, is highly evident in most modern societies in fashion, music, language and so on. The transmission of codes of behaviour between peers also implies that neither parents, teachers nor the media can be held primarily responsible for social movements that emanate from youth culture, including the problems that accompany them. Simply being absent or saying nothing is enough.

Moreover, the powerful influence of peer groups should not be underestimated. Above, we saw how peer group authority can come into opposition to adult authority; to add weight to this finding we found that peer group authority can even compete with powerful Caribbean religious values. In Chevannes' words, a boy's peer group "exacts an affinity and a loyalty as sacred as the bond of kinship, as strong as the sentiment of religion" (1999, 30).

Aspiring to be bad: peer group obligations and the rise of hard masculinity

For many boys the constant social "policing" of masculinity literally becomes a straight-jacket. These young men find themselves caught in a vise, where they occupy a narrow space of authorised masculinity while simultaneously being cut off from vast fields of social life which are rendered taboo by the very masculine standards that boys are under pressure to conform to. The rhetoric of the young men who were interviewed and their descriptions of the powerful influence of peer groups provided revealing insights into the standards against which boys are judged and the penalties exacted for failing to conform. At the forefront of these standards is hard, physical, risk-taking, aggressive masculinity which, according to Bailey and colleagues, young boys "embraced in the most uncompromising way" (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart 1998, 82).

Of course, constant surveillance is required to police "manliness" and we found that particularly intense scrutiny comes from peers. Peers are therefore positioned to judge appropriate masculinity and to punish transgressions. As a result, boys learn to choose their styles carefully and to craft an image for projection to the outside world, which partly reflects their personality but which also carefully attests to their allegiance to the prevailing standards of masculinity endorsed by their peers. Elaborate codes arise which govern acceptable clothing, the designer labels to be worn, the deployment of "bling" (jewellery acceptable to men), authorised styles of speech, striking a "cool" pose and so on. For many boys image is everything — it sustains their masculine reputation.

Of course, image is more than merely appearance, it also stems from what you do — image is very much about performance. In contemporary male culture, masculine status is enhanced greatly by displays of physical toughness, social dominance and sexual prowess. Moreover, the consequences of valorising hard and risky masculinities are far-reaching — this valorisation constitutes the very foundations of many of our most profound social problems. There is strong pressure to resist adult authority, to earn status by taking risks and to display one's masculine credentials. As Crichlow notes when describing his own adolescence in Trinidad, he attempted to secure his heterosexual masculine status not through sexual practice but by participating in events such as "stealing...breaking bottles with slingshots or stones on the street, engaging in physical fights, and 'hanging on the block' with boys until late at night" (Crichlow 2004, 200).

It is here that the links between the prevailing standards of masculinity and crime start to emerge. In effect, far from being considered anti-social, crime becomes the ultimate symbol of the types of masculinity that a society promotes — it stems from boys emulating the ways “real men” are supposed to act according to the culture they grew up in. As a result, Chevannes found the inner city don was a role model for boys not just because the don can command and dispense largesse but because he is “a living source of power — the power over life and death, the ultimate man” (Chevannes 1999, 29).

Sexual prowess and risk

It has become increasingly clear that gender roles are the engine that drives the AIDS epidemic. Men are subject to comprehensive social pressures to conform to gender roles, and the roles that relate to sexual risk-taking are directly implicated in the epidemiology of HIV.

Boys learn very early about complex codes of gender-based obligations and taboos that they are subject to. For example, Bailey and colleagues found that by the age of ten, boys had already learned that toughness, physical strength and sexual dominance were expected of them (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart 1998, 53). Moreover, while it is commonly claimed that there are deep taboos against discussing sexuality in public, this silence does not extend to young people themselves. On the contrary their environment is saturated with sexual references and they do a great deal of sexual “learning” from listening to the age group slightly older than they are (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart 1998, 29). Here again is an example of what we call “rolling peer pressure” — where culture is transmitted down through generations of boys and girls at arm’s length from adults. By way of contrast, parents and teachers are notable for their silence on these issues and the net result is that boys get virtually all of their sexual preparation on the street (Brown and Chevannes 1998, 23). Clearly young people are teaching themselves about sexual practice and the gender roles that should underpin that practice, largely with input from older peers and popular culture.

Against this vacuum is the reality that all societies attach paramount importance to achieving an appropriately gendered identity. The combination of adults being largely absent from sex education and of their ceding sex education to young people has important implications for this achievement. Sexuality and gender are tightly intertwined, and accomplishing a masculine (gendered) reputation is highly linked to adolescent discourses, peer group dynamics and sexual accomplishments. In this context it is notable that we found that some boys in Trinidad refer to their penis as a gun and their scrotum as a cartridge, while Chevannes reports that Jamaican youths often referred to their penis as a rifle (1999, 29). Clearly, there is a close symbolic relationship between power, risk, gender and sexuality in the minds of these young men.

According to Brown and Chevannes, Caribbean manhood is demonstrated by sexual prowess, and especially by the number of female sexual partners a young man has (1998, 23). The importance attached to having multiple sexual relationships for one’s reputation is tied to one of the Caribbean’s deepest male social taboos: homophobia. Crichlow

demonstrates this when he says that a male “who did not have as many women as the others was ‘sick’, ‘suspected of being a buller’ and not ‘the average young black male’” (Crichlow 2004, 206). Under these circumstances, where having multiple partners attests to one’s masculine status, even being faithful to a single partner can be a source of scorn and loss-of-face. For example, in Jamaica, we found that some communities derisively refer to someone who sticks to one partner as a “one burner” (corroborating the findings of Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart (1998, 65–66)). Interestingly, the stigma of being a “one burner” also relies on the (unspoken) leverage supplied by homophobia: if a male sticks to only one partner, then his masculinity is considered suspect and his “insufficient” interest in women is read as a sign that he might be gay.

Furthermore, gendered youth cultures have consequences that go far beyond sexual practice. In addition to the *quantity* of partners, a combination of masculine obligation and taboo profoundly configures the *quality* of young people’s relationships too — often adversely so. The basis for this impact stems from equating successful masculinity with physical and emotional strength and social dominance; a consequence of which is the creation of taboos around softness, tenderness and commitment. These taboos affect relationships between men and women as well as men’s interactions with each other.

Masculine taboos — enforcing ‘no-go’ zones

Almost as noticeable as the symbols of masculinity that are widely flaunted, are the human qualities that go “missing in action”. An early casualty is the ability to cry, or to be more accurate the ability to cry is not lost (the tear ducts remain functional), however crying in public is steadfastly suppressed. Most of the rest of the boy’s emotional repertoire soon falls under similar heavy restraints, particularly feelings that indicate tenderness. However, not all emotions are expunged; some — for example aggression and anger — are actively cultivated precisely because they symbolise masculine strength.

This substitution of aggressive gestures for signs of affection influences how boys interact with each other. For example, Brown and Chevannes report that boys greet each other “with clenched fists and backslaps” and often “use other forms of aggression to express their feelings” (1998, 30). Of course, there are always two sides to binary phenomena: aggression is both an expression of masculinity and a simultaneous public disavowal of tenderness. Morgan is quoted as saying that boy’s fights indicate an “overt disdain for anything that might appear soft or wet — more a taboo on tenderness than a celebration of violence” (Morgan quoted in Crichlow 2004, 200)

It becomes increasingly clear from the present research and from the cumulative findings of other Caribbean researchers that much of the “macho” acting out that is seen among boys and young men simultaneously affirms their allegiance to prevailing standards of masculinity while publicly attesting to what is being rejected: child-like, feminising, gay and castrating “failed” masculinities. The dominant culture positions toughness as the “hallmark of the real male” and physical responses are expected from boys. Boys who transgress those expectations risk being ridiculed and labelled a “sissy” by both boys and girls (Bailey, Branche and Henry-Lee 2002, 8).

Is boys' education a casualty of the rise in hard masculinity?

The combination of masculine obligation and taboo narrows boys' potential and cuts them off from large areas of social life, to their ultimate disadvantage. Embracing hard, risk-taking, often anti-social hyper-masculinities puts the lives of young men in danger: sexually, on the road, in the gang, and potentially in conflict with authority. By disenfranchising boys from activities that have been rendered taboo by their own peer group codes of masculinity, boys are denying themselves access to considerable longer-term social benefits. For example, if being safe is considered "sissy", then driving small low-powered cars at a safe speed on the highway in Trinidad potentially comes at a cost to one's reputation — and many opt to place themselves (and others) at risk in order to affirm their masculine status (on the roads and elsewhere). Likewise, if youth culture has come to equate education with their own emasculation through deep homophobic or misogynistic taboos ("only girls and bullers read"), then getting an education is no longer something that a "real man" would want to do. This is exactly what the present research has found, and these findings have been corroborated by the evidence of other Caribbean researchers.

For example, Chevannes reports interview data that show that the association built up in the minds of many boys is that school is "girl stuff" (Chevannes 1999, 26). Figueroa (2004, 152) develops this theme further when he reports that "boys actively assert their maleness by resisting school" especially when subjects are seen as feminine. He adds that male-child subculture puts peer pressure on boys to devalue certain school subjects and to be disruptive in class. To add to this picture, Crichlow (2004, 206) reports that many young Trinidadian men were of the opinion that academic subjects are for "bullers and women, while trades are for men". Finally, Odette Parry (2004, 179) finds that homophobic attitudes by staff result in the censure of attitudes and behaviours among students that are considered "effeminate", "girlish", "sissy like" and "nerdish". In turn, Parry (2000, 56; 2004, 179) found that these attitudes contribute to a masculine gender identity which rejects much of schooling as exactly that (effeminate, sissy, nerdish and so on).

Discussion

The educational achievements of Caribbean women over the last couple of decades constitute an important success story that deserves recognition and praise. Unfortunately, these successes are at risk of being overshadowed by shifts in boys' education towards consistently declining male educational achievement. Some commentators assume that these two changes are linked — that the progress made by Caribbean girls comes at the expense of Caribbean boys. The implications of such a proposition are profound and demand careful analysis.

In 1986 Errol Miller published his work *The Marginalisation of the Black Male: Insights from the Development of the Teaching Profession*. Miller's thesis — that Caribbean males were being marginalised by racialized social forces largely beyond their control — struck a chord which continues to reverberate two decades later, especially in popular

culture. Likewise, his thesis stimulated vigorous debate in academic circles and has been the subject of many academic critiques over the years.

In his analysis, Barry Chevannes (1999, 33) disagrees that males are being marginalized in the Caribbean if the main factor being considered is power. Mark Figueroa took the debate further by arguing that changes in male educational outcomes are a paradoxical effect of traditional male privilege rather than of marginalization. According to this theory, males have always enjoyed privileged access to public space which they dominated, whereas women were largely restricted to private domestic space. This male privileging of public space worked in favour of men's physical pursuits and against their academic endeavours whereas women being largely confined to the domestic sphere were inherently better placed to study.

While Figueroa's thesis reconfigures the debate from male marginalization to male privilege, it seems to perpetuate the cross-linking of girls' achievements and boys' shortcomings when he argues that boys' options will become increasingly limited as girls "take over" traditional male academic fields. He goes on to say that if this happens, ultimately there will be "little that boys can safely do without threatening their masculinity" (Figueroa 2004, 159). But in this regard, it should be noted that boys' education and men's academic pursuits in the past were privileged male domains too, and an explanation is still needed as to why boys might be vacating these particular areas of traditional privilege with apparent alacrity and not others.

Data from the present research add a further dimension to the analysis of Caribbean boys' educational achievements. The research supports previous findings that boys' affinity with public space and physicality is linked to the development of masculine identity. Moreover, in contemporary Caribbean settings, this identity seems to preferentially elevate hard, aggressive, dominant masculinity as the epitome of manhood — perhaps increasingly so in recent years. Certainly, gang culture and music laced with violent allusions have become more prominent in the Caribbean in the last couple of decades. But the present research also adds data concerning the role of masculine taboos in creating social "no-go zones" for young men, one of which increasingly seems to be education.

A surprising but important finding that has emerged from the research is the role of homophobia in stigmatizing boys who are academically inclined. This stands out in the data as a consistent and deep-seated phenomenon, not a minor diversionary issue. In the first instance, the role of homophobia seems difficult to account for, but it starts to make sense in the light of recent research that has found that homophobic abuse is primarily a device used by male peer groups to police manhood and is only secondarily concerned with sexual practice (the device works by stigmatizing "failed" masculinities' and by discrediting a boy's departures from authorised masculinity by labelling transgressors "bullers") (Plummer 2005). In this sense, as a repository for "failed manhood" and as a mechanism for policing particular forms of masculinity, homophobia is rightly seen as being a gender prejudice, one which weighs heavily on the lives of all men.

So where do these findings leave the male marginalization thesis? The conclusion from the present work is that if boys are being marginalized, then it seems likely that in fact they are actively absenting themselves. The process of developing a male identity involves adopting and displaying shared symbols of masculinity while simultaneously disavowing any hint of failed masculinity. Lately, education seems to have become increasingly associated with feminising and homophobic taboos. This may well have coincided with the progress made by girls in education, but there seems to be no reason why this has to be the case: greater access by women to education does not explain why males should necessarily have less access — unless, of course, it is taboo. In this regard, the boys' own misogynistic and homophobic taboos alienate them from large areas of social life that they would be much better off having access to.

The research raises several additional problematic issues which need to be addressed. First, given that homophobic and misogynistic taboos existed decades ago, why should they be influencing boys' education now? Unfortunately, ours is not a longitudinal study and this limits our ability to draw conclusions about historical changes. However, we do have some indication that at least two relevant changes are taking place: first, standards of masculinity are changing and second, unsupervised exposure to peer groups seems to have become much more important in the lives of young boys. There has been a shift away from more codified versions of masculinity (such as typifies cricket) towards harder risky physical masculinities. Moreover, with changing socioeconomic circumstances, due to a combination of longer working hours for parents and guardians, more households having fewer adults available for supervision, and perhaps restricted school hours because of shift schooling, a power vacuum has been created that peer groups have been able to exploit. There are now greater opportunities for young men to spend more unsupervised time with their peers. Under these circumstances, the hegemonic standards that boys aspire to are much more likely to be those standards that emanate from the competitive peer group cultures rather than older, more mature mentors. In short, boys' social spaces (the street, block, mall, school ground) are more of a jungle now than they were 30 years ago.

At this point it is appropriate to comment on the effect of class and race on these dynamics. It is generally assumed that this paper primarily reports on black working-class masculinities and that the dynamics we have observed may not apply outside of that context. In fact, with certain qualifications, we do not believe this to be the case. While there certainly were clear variations across class and race and between islands, our sampling crossed class divides and racial groups and the overarching dynamics we reported were identified across different social groupings. Variations when they appear in relation to class and race are more apparent in the finer details and the intensity of the peer-group dynamics, especially where masculinities spill over into the more intense atmosphere of the street in poorer communities, for example. There are a number of possible explanations for these dynamics being widespread, including that colonial experiences have imposed superordinate masculine codes, or that we are reporting on shared school and youth cultures that are distinct from the more nuanced cultures of the adult world.

The final issue that needs addressing concerns “victimhood”. By highlighting the role that contemporary peer-group culture plays, there is a risk of reproducing a classic “victim blaming” explanation for the problems boys face. We agree that this is an undesirable outcome and instead we would make the following points. What we are primarily attempting to do is to emphasise both the existence of, and the very significant impacts on, society that emanate from peer-based youth culture. What we have found is that these peer-based cultural forms can operate sometimes autonomously and sometimes in opposition to the wider external culture. Like most cultural forms they constantly evolve and members are able to exercise their agency. However, continuity is gained by peer-based codes being continuously passed between generations of young people often at arm’s length from adults (what we call “rolling peer pressure”). Our work leads us to conclude that these peer-based cultures are not minor artefacts but exert a powerful influence on wider society through music, fashion, linguistic styles and gendered praxis. Indeed, while it is generally thought that the wider culture sets standards for young people to emulate, in many cases the reverse happens: peer-based youth culture creates cultural trends that fundamentally change society, not least because the members carry the cultural norms with them into adulthood. Thus, rather than young men being passive victims of social change, they actively intervene in our future. And while wider society might experience the impact of peer-based youth culture adversely, those within the peer group have a more positive perspective as they work towards their aspirations of being “real men”, which on their terms means powerful, dangerous, daring and rebellious males, more like warriors than victims.

Nevertheless, the present research did find that gender roles create a trap that disadvantages both men and women. Through the twin mechanisms of obligation and taboo, a wide range of risks have become resiliently embedded in the social fabric and are highly resistant to change. We call this phenomenon “social embedding”. But there is cause for optimism: social and historical research has shown that gender roles are malleable and dominant masculinities have evolved radically over time and across cultures. The way forward, then, is to realise that victim blaming and individualistic behaviour-change interventions will inevitably have limited outcomes because of the way that risk is socially embedded (in gender roles, peer pressures and taboos). Instead, we need to look towards producing grassroots social change in gender roles. These social changes will inevitably have embedded behavioural outcomes which are much more likely to produce widespread, sustainable benefits for everyone, including our young men.

We would like to thank the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNESCO and the University of the West Indies for supporting this research.

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The University of
the West Indies
Centre for Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

Participation, More Than Add Women and Stir? A Comparative Case Analysis in Post-Coup Haiti

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Abstract

Women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have become targets for increasing development funding in recent years, a bigger slice in a bigger overall pie. In addition to being a consequence of gradual shifts within development orthodoxy regarding gender, this targeting of women's NGOs results from two recent trends, gender "mainstreaming" and the scale-up of funding to combat HIV/AIDS. Both are given a place in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) adopted by all member states within the United Nations.¹ Some feminists welcome this affirmation of women's importance and increase in funding for women's NGOs (Zaoudé and Sandler 2001; Porter and Judd 1999), while others are skeptical of "institutional feminism" (Bessis 2001) and the "NGOization of feminism" (Lind 2000; Alvarez 1999).

¹ These goals, specifically, are "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015," and "Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS" and "Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it."

Introduction

This divergence in feminist understandings of women's NGOs has encouraged several classificatory schema in understanding the vast array of women's NGOs and the gender paradigm structuring their practice and funding. Esther Boserup triggered a sustained critical discourse on gender following a popular critique of mainstream development (1970). A second wave of feminism in the North successfully brought about Women in Development (WID), specifically targeting women for development programs and demanding gender-disaggregated data. Transnational feminists and networks, including Caribbean leaders such as Peggy Antrobus, critiqued WID as representing just an "add women and stir" approach (Antrobus 2004; Moghadam 2005; Mohanty 2003). Molyneux and others argued women's "strategic gender interests" needed to be addressed, in addition to "practical" interests (1985). These feminist organizations argued that development interventions should specifically address gender as a category of analysis, as a system of inequality, leading to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach.

There have been several attempts to classify NGOs, reflecting the priorities of the taxonomy's author. For example, donors and political scientists tend to categorize NGOs in terms of size and organizational capacity (Desai and Preston 2000; Morton 1997, i-iv). Transnational feminists Sen and Grown propose a six-part model based on roles played in women's empowerment (1987, 90). Models for Haitian NGOs are similar to those in the general NGO literature. In 1989, the Groupe de Recherche et d'Appui au Milieu Rural (GRAMIR, a Haitian-Swiss NGO) published a study of Haitian NGOs outlining four types of NGOs based on ideologies of development (Mathurin, Mathurin, and Zaugg 1989). Keeping GRAMIR's first two types, Étienne (1997) added ideologies of underdevelopment to the classification. Regarding women's NGOs, Fonds Kore Fanm, a Canadian funding institution targeting feminist organizations, commissioned a study of training programs (Clermont, Mangonès, and Métellus 2003). In the study, again, a four-part typology was used to classify women's organizations based on how they define women's rights.

However useful these typologies are, they reproduce a conceptual assumption that NGOs are monolithic entities. As this paper highlights, confronted ethnographically, NGOs lose conceptual unity, as the many different "stakeholder groups" within them assign different meanings and identities to their actions (Hilhorst 2003, 146). All of the classifications roughly distinguish NGOs based on their relationship with their aid recipients: are they "clients" that primarily or only receive services, or are they "members" that in some real way define the process? I have argued earlier (Schuller 2007) that focusing on participation is a fruitful approach, particularly for studying women's NGOs that have had a history of politicizing women's participation (Thayer 2001) and self-conscious debate about NGO-ization (Nagar 2006; Lang 2000).

This paper offers an ethnographic examination of the two development paradigms, arguing that a top-down WID approach that does not address local gendered realities undercuts generalized feminist goals of local women's empowerment through limiting

local participation. In so doing, NGOs that promote this vision are less effective in promoting other goals such as stemming the feminization of HIV/AIDS. Comparing the relationships between two Haitian women's NGOs and aid recipients and communities, this paper argues that given similar (but not identical) constraints, especially Haiti's extreme social inequalities, women's NGOs can choose to structure their relationships with recipient communities differently. Despite this, even a Gender and Development (GAD)-oriented NGO with a long history of promoting women's empowerment can reproduce top-down approaches that erode recipient participation.

This paper is based on twenty months (October 2003-May 2005) of participant observation in Haiti with two women's NGOs, complemented by four months of archival and interview research with governmental and international organization representatives in Pòtoprens,² Brussels, Geneva, and Washington. In all, I formally interviewed twenty-one staff and eight clients at one NGO, twenty-two staff and eleven clients at the other, nine Haitian government staff, eight international NGO representatives, twelve donor representatives in Haiti, and twenty-one donor representatives at their international headquarters. I asked people to define concepts such as "participation" and "autonomy" and then assess their (and their NGO's) participation and autonomy, outline development priorities, their relationships with other stakeholder groups, and the roles of foreign institutions in Haiti's "contemporary situation."

Background: Two women's NGOs

Fanm Tèt Ansanm³

Fanm Tèt Ansanm was founded in 1985, during the last months of the Duvalier regime, by a small branch of the US government to train women factory workers in basic human development and health. Over time, because of the women's advocacy, Fanm Tèt Ansanm's training programs—following a feminist/Freirian pedagogy of consciousness-raising—grew to include basic and advanced literacy, worker's rights, and HIV/AIDS. In addition to the training, the women demanded a clinic, operating in two locations since 2006, with specialties in ob/gyn and dermatology, and offering free HIV/AIDS screening since 2007. Also because of worker advocacy, Fanm Tèt Ansanm organized a Women's Committee to Defend Workers' Rights. While not using the language of intersectionality as formulated by Collins (2000) or Crenshaw (2001), and while even bristling at the label of "feminist,"⁴ their work targeting women and their gender-equality ideology are typical of the GAD paradigm.

² In this paper I refer to place names in the Haitian Kreyòl, the only language of 90 percent of Haiti's population and the first language of all Haitians. Despite this, and despite its status as an official language, it remains marginalized.

³ Names of groups and individuals in this paper are pseudonyms. "Fanm Tèt Ansanm" is Kreyòl for "Women United"—literally, "heads together."

⁴ Some staff defined "feminism" as "militant," whereas others defined it as a professional class activity. Both explanations were used as critiques of the concept. Only two staff identified themselves as feminists, and none defined the organization's work as feminist.

Fanm Tèt Ansanm has an array of donors—mostly private, European NGOs, most of whom have funded them for over a decade. According to criteria established by donors, Fanm Tèt Ansanm is performing beyond numerical expectations. For example, they promised to distribute 84,400 condoms in 2003, whereas they distributed 103,956. Some 485 instead of 420 people completed voluntary AIDS testing. Instead of 5,950 people attending educational seminars on HIV/AIDS, almost double that number attended, that is, 10,129. In the clinic, 1,992 people were counseled on family planning methods between October 1, 2003, and September 30, 2004, a period covering one of their donors' fiscal years. Of these people, 239 accepted condom usage, 59 accepted the contraceptive injection Depo-Provera, and 65 accepted some form of a pill. In addition to family planning, 3,977 people had a consultation with one of Fanm Tèt Ansanm's doctors during the same period. Because of this, and because of their longevity and connection to a large population, it became one of the sub-recipients for a large grant from the Global Fund (to Fight AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis) in 2003.

Sove Lavi⁵

Sove Lavi began as a program within a UN branch in the late 1980s, during Haiti's tumultuous *dechoukaj* period following Duvalier's ouster and before the first democratic elections. Sove Lavi's first and longest-standing program was also based on one of Freire's suggestions (1985), Community Action Councils (CAC's). Sove Lavi assembled community leaders, mostly from peasant organizations but also some rural women's organizations, and trained them to *simaye* (disseminate) public health messages, the first being hygiene. According to Haitian NGO researchers, the Duvalier regime politicized CACs, using them to reward constituents, particularly those who also served as informants (Mathurin, Mathurin, and Zaugg 1989: 47; Gabaud 2000). Typical of a WID approach, Sove Lavi practices a form of *discrimination positive* (French-language interpretation of "affirmative action") in which the majority of CAC members need to be women.

Because of their long-standing work in training community public health leaders, Sove Lavi became one of the largest recipients of HIV/AIDS prevention funding, including from the Global Fund. Almost overnight, Sove Lavi "scaled up"—increased its services (Thomas-Slayter 1992; Uvin 1996)—following this influx of donor funding that also included funds from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). From a single office with five staff, Sove Lavi grew to a four-center operation employing over 30 people within less than eighteen months. Its goals also exponentially grew. For example, they planned a Caravan traveling to remote communities with a self-contained sound system to attract crowds to learn about HIV/AIDS. Sove Lavi envisioned two to three thousand people attending each tour of the Caravan, and forty-eight tours per year, attracting 96,000 to 144,000 people per year. The results of Sove Lavi interventions have been mixed. Some goals of Sove Lavi were met, such as that participants in training programs would be able to correctly identify the major means of contraction and prevention of HIV. Others, including those for the Caravan, Sove Lavi was far from attaining.

⁵ Kreyòl for "Saving Lives"

Institutional differences

Women in both groups were involved in their communities, and were often sought out and called into positions of leadership. The relationships that the two NGOs' aid recipients have with their communities were similar; however there were a few institutional differences in the NGOs that engendered some distinctions between the relationships. Also owing to institutional differences, the two populations of aid recipients differed in social layers (*kouch*)—if not exactly classes in the Marxist sense (Jean 2002,19).⁶

First contact

People become involved with the two NGOs by different processes. Sove Lavi had an elaborate process for selecting CAC members. First, Sove Lavi staff organized a pre-screening mission to identify local health and educational institutions, who referred to them names of local leaders and groups. During the first meeting, local organizations were told about the process. They selected nine candidates to form a “cellule,” and Sove Lavi staff screened these nine candidates at a public meeting. The candidates were given tests, such as knowledge about HIV/AIDS and other community health concerns, their French reading ability, their comfort with public speaking, and “respectability” in the community. After a two-and-a-half hour process of examination, Sove Lavi staff from Pòtoprens consulted one another and selected the five people to invite as CAC members.

By contrast, anyone was welcome to frequent the Fanm Tèt Ansanm center, attend the special events, visit the clinic, take classes, or become a member of one of the two committees (the Women's Committee and the AIDS motivators). To join a committee, the only requisite was to complete all necessary training programs. For example, to conduct HIV/AIDS education requires a basic understanding of health. To be an effective problem-solver and advocate, people need to know their rights and be aware of community resources. There were two primary modes of contact with Fanm Tèt Ansanm: referral by a current member-volunteer or by “motivation” in the factories. Most of the women I had interviewed said that a friend or coworker referred them to Fanm Tèt Ansanm. Several people in turn told me that they had referred others to the NGO. At the public celebrations, such as International Women's Day, World Health Day, Labor Day, World Literacy Day, International Day Against Violence Against Women, and World AIDS Day, attendees are invited to sign up for training sessions and eventually become Women's Committee members or motivators for the AIDS prevention program. Another means of “motivation” is for staff to enter the industrial park. Workers are usually given no more than a half-hour break from the factory assembly line, so the pace was frenetic, with thousands of women and men descending upon a row of a dozen *timachann* (street

⁶ The word “class” was often used to distinguish between “haves” and “have nots.” A local perspective distinguishes many types of “have-nots” — divided into *couches sociales*, not classes. Most people used the word *kouch* (Kreyòl spelling) to refer to differences in specific terms, whereas a few people used the word *klas* to refer generally to class struggle.

merchants) serving food. Yvette was efficient, usually giving the entire stack of journals, brochures, or other Fanm Tèt Ansanm materials she and others brought with them within minutes. Yvette shouted above the crowd noise, repeating phrases about visiting the clinic or attending the first day of a new class, until an individual sought her out. At this point, she stopped what she was doing, called out, “*cheri*,” and attempted a personal conversation under the circumstances.

Orientation: Setting apart or tying together

This difference in selection also structures a difference in orientation. People who visited Fanm Tèt Ansanm and became committee members were peers with their co-workers and neighbors. While they sometimes played specified roles at events, they received no other special treatment, and the only meetings to which they were the only ones invited were those of the two committees. Ritually reinforcing this unity as community, most public events ended in one of four songs, each with a different message. *Rasanble* (Kreyòl for “assemble”) calls upon women to organize and put their heads together in unity. *Fanm yo, si n pa rele* (“Women, if we do not speak up...”) talks about the importance of women speaking up to defend their rights. *Òganizasyon* (“Organization”) declares that, while women’s burdens are enormous, they can advance if organized. Finally, the message of *Piti, piti* (“Bit by bit”) is that bit by bit, we are advancing: we are gaining ground in our struggles for equality and justice, as women and as workers. After large public celebrations, staff handed out a plate of food and a cup of Couronne—a popular, bright orange, syrupy-sweet Haitian soft drink—to all present. Staff viewed this as an important gesture, reversing class/status group roles, whereby NGO professionals are serving factory workers. Over and again, the message reinforced was that the solution to Haiti’s problems is *tèt ansanm*: unity, dialogue, and working together.

By contrast, Sove Lavi CAC members were treated differently from community members. Most of Sove Lavi’s activities were with CAC members, ritually reinforced as “representatives” of the community. They were intermediaries, communicating back and forth between the community and Sove Lavi. Part of the reason for this was geographical. Unlike Fanm Tèt Ansanm—situated in the middle of the export-processing zone where their aid recipients work—but *like* most NGOs in Haiti, Sove Lavi’s central office was in Pòtoprens, but the vast majority of their service was in the provinces.⁷ In addition, Sove Lavi daily practice and organizational culture exacerbated this inequality. Instead of a horizontal, community relationship that Fanm Tèt Ansanm rituals reinforced, Sove Lavi ritual practice emphasized the distinction between their recipients and communities.

To commemorate World AIDS Day, Sove Lavi prepared a skit with youth at a provincial drop-in center, written and choreographed by a university artist, to “motivate” surrounding communities. Following a suggestion from USAID health contractor CDS (Bernard and Desormeaux 1996), Sove Lavi made strategic use of local knowledge, including local slang for terms describing sexuality and cultural metaphors such as

⁷ A total of 258 out of 291 officially-registered NGOs who gave this information are headquartered in Pòtoprens and its suburbs, whereas only 45 of the NGOs said they provide services in the capital.

Bawòn Samdi (the spirit of death, guardian of the cemetery) to represent AIDS.⁸ The skit was quite frank, emphasizing condom usage. Actors were mostly high school students, which in Haiti means that they were in the top tenth socioeconomic bracket.⁹ After they finished putting on their outfits and makeup, the group nervously waited for longer than an hour for the market to close. Finally, fed up and hungry, the Pòtoprens staff person in charge decided to go ahead during the market. The youth volunteers performed their skit well, attracting a small crowd of curious market women and a few old men who had stopped playing dominoes. As a sequel to the skit, Sove Lavi had prepared an education forum for the community, complete with two HIV-positive people to testify, a public health nurse, and a DJ with a very loud sound system.

No one came. The Pòtoprens staff left to fetch boxed lunches for the youth volunteers, who were growing more irritable. The community liaison and the nurse retreated to the liaison's house for lunch. I walked around town with Gabrielle, one of the HIV-positive people. She was upset, telling me that she felt used, complaining about the lack of motivation provided to bring people to the session. After what seemed like an awkward eternity to everyone, the Pòtoprens staff returned with lunch for middle-class staff and center volunteers. I was given one but local youth and the would-be presenters like Gabrielle were not, as they were given a "per diem" that was supposed to include food.¹⁰ I gave my lunch to the presenters to share, but hungry local youth had only chicken bones and whatever else was thrown away as the group dumped their trash in the schoolyard and left in their rented bus.

The message to recipient communities from these and other practices is that direct beneficiaries of Sove Lavi are set apart from the local community, straining local relationships, as Marie Ange explained:

[They say] "you're making money off of us! When you talk to us about these things, you will make money." I explain to them, I don't take the training for money and I don't give it for money. When we have them sign, they don't want to sign. They always say, "But yes! You will make money and when you make us write [our names], we won't get anything."

Marie Ange is referring to a practice of having people sign their names on an attendance sheet that Sove Lavi requires of participants after every event. This ritual act reinforced the differences between the well-paid staff and CAC members who receive stipends and the local community-at-large. While CAC members were also neighbors, friends, relatives, members of local churches or other organizations, this act marked CAC members as the chosen elect, with the Pòtoprens staff. Especially painful to CAC members was that these pre-existing relationships were central reasons Sove Lavi chose

⁸ This follows Daniel Miller's argument about local cultural meanings to capitalism and consumption proliferating, providing space for local expression while integrating the local into the transnational process (1997).

⁹ In the provinces even fewer people attend high school.

¹⁰ Sove Lavi's paid staff also received a per diem, yet ate.

them in the first place.

Using the more fine-grained status category of *kouch* as opposed to an “objective” notion of class,¹¹ patterns can be seen in the two NGOs’ service populations. As noted above, one of Sove Lavi’s requirements for CAC members is mastery of French, the language of the elite. To speak French requires an education, which in turn requires a considerable portion of families’ income. (A cheap Pòtoprens school¹² costs 550 goud per month per child, more than a third of a minimum-wage-earner’s income.) In addition, all but one of Sove Lavi’s CAC members I met¹³ owned her/his house or other land somewhere.

Comparing the socioeconomic differences in the two populations, as well as the human resources invested in the membership, it can be said that while members of both are community leaders, Fanm Tèt Ansanm “grows” leaders while Sove Lavi “imports” them. Georges of Sove Lavi illustrated this point: “Sove Lavi does not create organizations. I mean, we find them in the field, we help them and we work with them.” By contrast, Fanm Tèt Ansanm invested as much as two years of educational training in factory workers who may or may not be literate in Kreyòl before visiting Fanm Tèt Ansanm. After this investment, a staff person at Fanm Tèt Ansanm invited them to become Women’s Committee or AIDS motivator members. Sove Lavi found people with high levels of educational, linguistic, and symbolic capital, including experience with organizations.

Relationships between NGO and recipients

Sove Lavi: Clients

Relationships between Sove Lavi and its service population were typical of client/patron. Sove Lavi organized a three-day national conference bringing together the dual themes of violence against women and the feminization of AIDS. This was a major undertaking, as they coordinated more than 30 partner organizations who brought people from all over the country. There were over 40 speakers in two concurrent break-out sessions. Speakers included leaders within the Haitian government, the NGO sector, and several international organizations. The conference was well attended; the official count was 350 people. In addition, the conference was well discussed; fifteen media outlets—print, radio and television—covered the event. At an exposition hall, NGOs, community groups, and artists displayed their pictures, pamphlets, T-shirts, and items for sale.

The conference was held at the Hotel Montana, posh by even US standards. Sessions started late, because all but one of the government, donor, and NGO representatives went over their allotted times to speak. The end of the conference, designed for everyone to discuss problems and solutions, was therefore cut short. The finale, participants

¹¹ For example, while external or Marxist understandings lump 78 percent of Haiti’s people who earn \$2 per day as “in poverty,” local realities and hierarchies divide this population into several *kouch*.

¹² People call these schools “*lekòl bòlèt*”—literally, “lottery school,” in other words, take your chances.

¹³ Or their family, as most still lived in the traditional extended family *lakou* system.

presenting summaries of their break-out group conversations, was set aside to make room for the US Ambassador, who had shown up on time and could not wait until his time in the rotation would have come up. While the people were reporting on their discussions and recommendations, Sove Lavi held a reception for VIPs. The serving tables were extravagantly filled with Haitian and foreign hors d'oeuvres, meats, cheeses, and the staple of beans and rice. Two Sove Lavi staff members assured me that people would have enough to eat, that they had learned from previous days' experience whereby aid recipients went without food. After the reception was over, the curtains were opened, revealing a large line of people trying to get food. No additional plates of food were set. The lesson learned was not to have a more equitable distribution of food, but to put up the boundaries and make that privilege invisible. Further, the VIPs were taken away from aid recipients precisely when they were presenting their findings.

As even casual observers note, Haiti is an incredibly inegalitarian society. It is second to Namibia in terms of economic inequality in the world (Jadotte 2006). This inequality cannot help but color the relationships between NGOs and aid recipients. In Haiti, there is a popular conception of a *klas ONG*, an "NGO class" (see Schuller forthcoming for further discussion). These differences between professional NGO staff people and their aid recipients color their perceptions about recipients' participation in the work of the NGOs, and undermine organizational effectiveness. In their interviews with me, Sove Lavi's CAC members were uniformly critical of these practices that reproduced exclusion: "What I see here, I don't want it. Why don't I want it? I don't like their strategy, [and] I don't like their mode of functioning. I don't need for them not to exist, no. But I would like them to change." Said another, "We feel far away from them." During missions to the provinces, Sove Lavi staff were nearly always late, the number one frustration of CAC members. A focus group evaluation for USAID, eight months after Sove Lavi had last visited CAC members, began with a litany of their complaints about Sove Lavi.¹⁴ Tellingly, we showed up two hours after the meeting was to have begun. Answering a question, "What training did you receive at Sove Lavi?", CAC members each responded with a single-phrase answer about the substance of the training, and then launched into specific complaints, such as a lack of communication, promises broken, a lack of follow-up, and the consequences to their relationships with the community.

The lines of communication between Sove Lavi and CAC members were strained. Staff usually called CAC members—most often they chose one to serve as the go-between—a few days in advance of a visit to the provinces. Several CAC members complained about this. Said one, "Sove Lavi should give us two or three days' advance warning to know what we need to do and what we're not doing...they should first propose a meeting, because we might not all have time." Danielle was more specific: "Yesterday afternoon I received a little note they sent for us for today. Truly, this isn't good."

CAC members were also concerned about what they understood as promises Sove Lavi

¹⁴ I attended two focus group evaluations. The other meeting was more cordial but CAC members still voiced concerns.

had made to the community. Said Maxime, “They proposed us a lot of stuff: they proposed a community school, a community toilet, things like that. But we wrote and gave them [a demand]; they never gave us a response.” Lack of follow-up was a major concern for even otherwise accommodating CAC members, including Marie-Ange: “What would I like Sove Lavi to do? I would like them, they should always have follow-through because when there isn’t follow-through, it’s as though you washed your hands very well, and you wiped them on the ground.”¹⁵

This lack of follow-through put a strain on CAC members’ relationship with their community, as outlined by a CAC member: “And there are schools that say, ‘You never come back anymore.’ We say, ‘Well. It’s not our fault. We don’t depend on ourselves. When they send us, we go.’” A relationship of dependence was reinforced, highlighted by the phrase, “We don’t depend on ourselves.” CAC members, representatives of Sove Lavi in the eyes of the community, were held accountable for its actions. Said one, “You understand: ‘Where is what you started? And after that you don’t do anything anymore.’” This creates tension in the community. Said one member, “We lose face as well, to stand in front of other groups we helped to train.”

Fanm Tèt Ansanm: Members?

In the context of Haitian NGOs, Fanm Tèt Ansanm stood out in its openness to its aid recipients who wrote individual articles in the journal and sometimes chose the issues to be selected in the journal. Fanm Tèt Ansanm attempted to “back up” its Committee leaders, supporting them in their initiatives. Fanm Tèt Ansanm provided space for women who were afraid to join unions. Frisline continued, “No matter how we speak with them, if you stand up for your rights, they fire you.” Thérèse argued that workers just knowing their rights is a source of empowerment, that it levels the relationship a little. “It’s not because the boss doesn’t know he doesn’t have the right to do things to you, no...it’s because he has the advantage over you.” In this context, simply providing workers’ rights training is helpful for workers who feel they cannot obtain justice as workers. Complementing this is a meeting space for workers to discuss the issues they have in common. During its heyday, the Women’s Committee met at least monthly to discuss problems in the factories, and they would strategize about the solutions and offer support to individual Committee members in applying them. Just offering this training and moral support helps the workers, as Frisline explains, “Fanm Tèt Ansanm does a lot for us. They give us knowledge and help us become unafraid, so we can demand our rights.”

While working at a factory in the industrial park, Women’s Committee leader Héléne fell ill. Knowing her rights to insurance (OFATMA), she visited the OFATMA office and asked to withdraw the funds taken out of her pay envelopes every payday. To her surprise, the government office did not even have a file for her. Héléne called a special meeting of the Women’s Committee to discuss this. The group decided to meet with OFATMA representatives to force Héléne’s employer to comply with the law. OFATMA staff opened an account for Héléne and her coworkers but did not require the company to pay five years’ back contributions. In response, Héléne and other Women’s Committee

¹⁵ The end of this sentence is a Kreyòl proverb, *lavi men, siye ate*.

members wrote an article simply explaining OFATMA's responsibilities in Fanm Tèt Ansanm's Kreyòl language journal. The journal has a circulation of 5,000–10,000 copies printed and distributed such as during the “feeding frenzy” mentioned above with Yolette in the industrial park, but also given to other NGOs and government agencies. This campaign generated many similar visits to the agency, as workers were empowered to defend their rights. Several individuals¹⁶ who used the information in the journal to plead their case were able to demand that their accounts be opened.

Some women apply their knowledge from training in neighborhood associations. The impact is difficult to measure in increasingly popular quantitative calculi, but the women themselves are grateful to Fanm Tèt Ansanm for their new abilities. Communities have leaders who read and write Kreyòl, know basic first aid, are aware of how to prevent HIV/AIDS transmission, and are aware of their rights and some community resources. As Luna said, “The work Fanm Tèt Ansanm does is solid. They trained us, and they help us to know. We have become points of hope where we live.” Fanm Tèt Ansanm trains and provides some materials for first aid agents. However, the women do appreciate the services they receive. But services could be improved, as Marcial explained:

They receive us very well, they speak to us well about women and about everything we need. In Kreyòl class, if they didn't train us we would never understand anything when someone speaks to you. In the clinic, it's totally good, but when they prescribe you a drug, it is expensive to buy elsewhere. So, if you have a problem, it's difficult to resolve it.

Especially in the context of other NGOs, Fanm Tèt Ansanm's having an open, “warm” greeting is important, one where recipients are “received well.” However, there are limits. While the political context and violence kept many services from fully functioning, the clinic's doors remained open most days. When I pointed this out in my initial findings, staff argued that a woman's health is a primary need, unlike training programs. This still did not explain the difference between the Women's Committee and the HIV/AIDS prevention program. At least twice during my observations, the Women's Committee meeting was pre-empted by a meeting of the HIV/AIDS prevention program. And the “promoters” of the prevention program received a monthly transportation stipend while Women's Committee members did not.

Participation

In general, donors agree that genuine space for participation makes projects more effective. But what counts as “participation,” and how is it defined? A peasant in Bamòn, Haiti, critiqued the rhetoric as masking inequalities in the process: “Participation just means that we get to carry a lot of heavy rocks on our heads” (Smith 2001, 34). Others have written extensively about the subject (e.g., Hickey and Mohan 2004; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Paley 2001), particularly from a feminist perspective (e.g. Parpart 1999;

¹⁶ Albeit as individuals, as OFATMA did not maintain a proactive stance past this initial period of embarrassment.

Cornwall 2004; Leve 2001; Mansbridge 1999). Giselle lamented, “I thought that they would ask us what programs we wanted...They only want us there to take pictures, but when we actually talk about our real issues, they send us outside.”

Building on Hickey and Mohan’s temporal dimensions of participation (both imminent and immanent), I argue that participation needs to be understood as a process. To assess this, in addition to the open-ended questions about people’s definitions of participation, I employed a snapshot—a chart outlining who is involved in eight stages of a development project (**Table 1**). I also observed actual practices. I asked people to mark with an X who completed a given step in a development project: NGO staff, donors, or aid recipients. Sometimes in the context of a larger interview, I filled in the chart. Based on a composite of responses from individual and focus group interviews, corroborated by observations, the difference in member participation in Sove Lavi and Fanm Tèt Ansanm can be represented graphically. While “conception” or “evaluation” may be differently defined and practiced, the terms used were my own interpretation and definition. There was therefore a standardized lexicon for research participants, which proved especially useful with populations that were not development professionals.

At Sove Lavi, CAC members and other aid recipients only participated in the execution of the project, and sometimes organization. They were rarely consulted in “planning” the project. To the best of their knowledge, the project arose from nowhere, as described above. Especially in remote rural areas, where there is little government or international organization presence, few resources and next to no jobs, few people would oppose this program that offers resources such as tapes, pens, other educational materials, food, money, and in some cases a youth center complete with satellite Internet and television. “We count on you; you are the only ones who have ever come to see us,” a community leader said at a planning meeting. While community members, especially young women, may individually actively support the idea of bringing educational resources, and many have personal stories testifying to the importance of HIV education, this consent needs to be understood as what Freire described as “participation under control” (quoted in Regan 2003, 10), or managed consent (Gramsci 1971). One mission to the South province I attended included a planning meeting for the following month. CAC members were given a choice of dates for hosting community education forums and had to sign the attendance roster in order to receive stipends. There was no space for member questions, and the words members spoke in public were “yes” or “no” or a date and time. As mentioned above, CAC members did not like this approach, seeing it as a lack of respect. Incidentally, this meeting that I attended was rendered moot, as USAID had pulled their funding for the project. Frontline staff who went on the mission did not know about this funding shift. Said Mme. Auguste, responsible for the Sove Lavi program in that province, “I didn’t know that it was our last day...I thought we had time to resume again.”

As noted above, many scholars have argued and this model shows that participation is more than execution. Communities should be able to define their own priorities and design programs according to local needs and realities. At one location in the provinces, all Sove Lavi participants had scored above 95% on a test of their knowledge of

HIV/AIDS. Staff returned to Pòtoprens in their SUV, but I stayed to talk with CAC members. As the dust settled, I asked people—community trainers themselves—what methods of HIV prevention they practiced. Immediately, the group burst into laughter. “My friend, we would very much like to practice HIV prevention,” Djoni began. “But they never give us condoms. With all the money they spend on gas and their staff, they could at least give us condoms, no?” Being naïve and an anthropologist, I retorted, “but you tell people to practice abstinence,” triggering another round of laughter. Speaking over others, Danielle was finally given the chance to finish her thought. “They tell us to not have sex. We tell other people not to have sex. We’re okay with not having sex. But for many women here, we don’t have the ability to refuse sex when a man wants to. Even if it’s just a couple pennies, we need to feed our families. They should focus on reinforcing our economic capacity.” Almost everyone chimed in, wanting to add to this analysis, adding specific suggestions. Maxime argued, “If we are thinking about giving someone knowledge, don’t forget that I already said that the knowledge can’t advance when the person is hungry. And hunger is the biggest illness there is.” Several CAC members pointed this out, citing the Kreyòl proverb, *sak vid pa kanpe* (the empty sack does not stand up). They had a plan to create small businesses with a revolving loan fund and open a revenue-generating youth activity center that would also bring cultural events to the area. They brought these suggestions to Sove Lavi staff. “Nothing happened. All these promises and nothing ever happens.” Reflecting on their experience, Maxime said, “There isn’t a real collaboration. Our interests are not their interests, they aren’t common?” Djoni was more direct: “That’s not participation, that’s ‘do [this] for me.’”

By contrast, members of Fanm Tèt Ansanm committees and other *medanm* participated in agenda setting. Most programs existed because of previous advocacy on the part of the *medanm*: the clinic, the course on legal rights, and the Women’s Committee. Members had input on the journal topics, such as the one during the campaign for OFATMA. There was another campaign, to ask publicly subsidized transport “Service Plus” to provide buses for workers. Like the OFATMA campaign, they used the journal. Hélène discusses yet another campaign in the journal: “In our journal published on March 8 (International Women’s Day), I called upon all the brave women, all conscientious women for them to protest the thirty-six goud minimum wage.” This simple chart (Table 1) was a useful tool to document differences in participation between Sove Lavi and Fanm Tèt Ansanm. Once documented, differences can be questioned and theorized.

Similarities

Despite Fanm Tèt Ansanm and Sove Lavi having different orientations to their aid recipients and their communities, different relationships with their recipients, and different levels of participation, there are important similarities. Recipients have a different understanding from that of staff about recipient participation.

Because this “snapshot” tool can be (and was, in my case) used by aid recipients to assess participation, it allows a polyvocality missing from most statistically oriented, often donor-funded, NGO research, where one voice (usually the director or designee) speaks for the entire organization. In addition to directors experiencing real-world or perceived pressures to cover up problems or provide positive spin—especially to donors—they

might not know what goes on in the field or after hours. While it may seem intuitive, it bears noting that differences in position or social location shape people's understanding, including that of a foreign anthropologist. As **Table 2** shows, donors and directors have different understandings of local participation from those held by the "participants" themselves. Table 2 shows that donors and NGO directors believe that the aid recipients (the "target population") participated in defining the problem, prioritizing, project conception, planning, and evaluation in addition to execution. By contrast, local community members felt that they participated only during the execution, in other words, when work needed to be done, not just at Sove Lavi but also at Fanm Tèt Ansanm.

Why did committee members at Fanm Tèt Ansanm, which I characterized with greater aid recipient participation, say that they only feel they participate like the peasant in Bamòn, to carry heavy rocks? First of all, it is worth pointing out that several current staff like Yolette began their contact with Fanm Tèt Ansanm as a volunteer, like Hélène or Frisline, who filled out the table. Yolette was among the group of people pushing for new directions. Why then do current aid recipients not feel the same as the donors? There are two potential explanations. First, as argued above, socioeconomic differences between staff and aid recipients color people's perceptions. Second, like all models, the current chart that I used has weaknesses, including that it presents information as if it were ahistorical. This is why I call it a "snapshot." It fixes an image, freezes it in time. Had I been there earlier, I could have given two such "snapshots," comparing Fanm Tèt Ansanm five years ago to today. A different story emerges because NGOs, like everything else, change over time. In a follow-up meeting at Fanm Tèt Ansanm in September 2006, aid recipients critiqued the lack of progress on their ideas and initiatives, such as staff support for obtaining legal documents, support for neighborhood associations, transport, a community cash box based on a *sòl* model for when the women need medical care, etc. They lamented their lack of real participation. In December 2006, the Women's Committee formally presented several demands to Fanm Tèt Ansanm, including that members receive a stipend similar to that offered on the AIDS prevention program. Said one, "Now we can speak of the Women's Committee. The meeting is set for the 30th. When [Fanm Tèt Ansanm] opens again, we will meet with [the staff] to know how, if the Committee is still happening this year, how things can improve." The lack of communication, and the frustration at not receiving answers to what Women's Committee members felt were simple demands, colored their experiences, causing some to question their relationship with Fanm Tèt Ansanm in ways similar to Sove Lavi's CAC members:

And the salary for all of this is 250G ... these things need to change. If we need to take a car...When we show up, they need to find a little bread and cola. If I give you my energy to help other people, I need to be able to help myself as well. You pay for the transport, but you need to pay for more than the transport. At times the children say, "my mom left." From the time I leave, everyone has hope!

As of March 2007, the Women's Committee was all but disbanded.¹⁷ Given this, and the increasing intensity of complaints of Committee members, it is clear that participation was eroding further. Committee members identified their activities with the HIV/AIDS prevention as *travay pou Fanm Tèt Ansan* —“work” that they do “for Fanm Tèt Ansanm” (notice the use of the word “salary” in the quotation above), a further clue to their disaffection as members and with Fanm Tèt Ansanm's priorities of HIV/AIDS prevention.

Why is this happening at an organization that follows feminist/Freirian empowerment models, that consistently prioritized women's rights, and even defended this mission to past donors who wanted to impose other priorities? Since its flowering in the mid-1980s, the women's movement in Haiti generally, as well as specific women's NGOs, have always been caught between the need to prioritize gender as well as political and economic structures (Benoit 1995; Charles 1995; N'Zengou-Tayo 1998; Racine 1999). Rose, who works at Fanm Tèt Ansanm, argues that radical economic changes are needed to begin to address women's conditions: “First, you need to begin to improve the people's conditions...When there is work, women can demand their rights...But today, she can't even do that because there isn't work.” Fanm Tèt Ansanm is thus grappling with typical dilemmas of what Lind terms “popular feminist organizations” (Lind 2000) under neoliberal structural adjustment. Like other women's NGOs with a broader agenda that implicitly acknowledges the intersectionality of inequality shaping Haitian women's conditions (Coomaraswamy 2002; Corcoran-Nantes 2000; Hrycak 2002), Fanm Tèt Ansanm had been able to prioritize women's needs.

Why would this disaffection and erosion of participation occur now, after nineteen years of its existence? It is possible that this is in part a methodological problem, as staff recount the “good old days” or it may be that volunteer leaders chosen to work for Fanm Tèt Ansanm have a stake in highlighting their capacity to act, their agency. However, as their director noted, priorities for their donors—even those offering long-standing support—have changed: “Now, suddenly, AIDS is the great craze. Everyone needs to finance AIDS. The day may come when there is too much money in AIDS, considering that all the rest, we are neglecting everything else, the human [development] element, the social element, and this is not good.” In addition to the Global Fund, Fanm Tèt Ansanm's other donors have joined the “great craze.” In the past, donors had sufficiently diverse priorities to be able to match the medianm. Nowadays, donors have become more quantitative in their management approaches, and are moving away from general operating support to project approaches. The rhythm and the logic of the project does not easily accommodate unplanned, unanticipated needs arising from the ground up. This situation has been made all the more difficult by donors' increasingly quantitative “results” management regimes (Pollock 2003), beginning with the Global Fund that promised to end “business as usual.”

¹⁷ A year later there was no evidence of its existence.

Summary

This paper has discussed two women's NGOs with different approaches to gender and different relationships with their community. I argue that the two are not unrelated. Sove Lavi, a WID organization, offers less space for member deliberation and participation than Fanm Tèt Ansanm, a GAD organization. Fanm Tèt Ansanm invests human capital in the aid recipients, all of whom are invited to participate, whereas Sove Lavi harvests this investment, what Georges called an "interest strategy" (*estrateji enterè*). This in turn shapes the NGOs' relationships with the community. Fanm Tèt Ansanm ritual practices attempt to forge a horizontal, egalitarian model, whereas Sove Lavi ritual practices heighten local inequality. The differences are most clearly articulated when examining levels of participation. At Sove Lavi, aid recipients just "carry heavy rocks" while Fanm Tèt Ansanm volunteers participate in defining priorities and planning. However, the clear shift towards AIDS at the expense of other priorities is arguably at the root of Fanm Tèt Ansanm's mission drift and erosion of member participation.

I have argued in this paper that clientelistic approaches are ineffective. While in the aggregate, Haiti is showing signs of progress in stemming the tide of HIV/AIDS (Cohen 2006), approaches like Sove Lavi's imposition of donors' priorities that do not meaningfully involve communities and their practices end up wasting scarce resources. CAC members, abandoned for a hit-and-run caravan approach, have the local knowledge, experience, and reputation to be effective tools in the combat against the disease. Specific practices reinforcing inequalities inherent in Haiti's lopsided economy, coupled with a top-down imposition of a single approach (abstinence) to the exclusion of supporting local initiatives, are cutting off the potential of local participation to respond effectively and appropriately to this pandemic.

Table 1: Comparison of Participation

	<i>SOVE LAVI</i>			<i>FANM TÈT ANSANM</i>		
	Donor	NGO staff	Target Population	Donor	NGO staff	Target population
Discussion – What problems exist in our area?						
Prioritization – Make decisions – what are the most pressing concerns?						
Conception – What solutions exist for these problems?						
Planning – Make a plan, assessing resources available.						
Organization – Tasks and timeline finalized; who does what, when?						
Execution – Put our hands together to work, on the ground working.						
Follow-through – Supervise work, ensure that it is being done properly						
EVALUATION – ASSESS HOW THE WORK WAS DONE. WHAT WORKED WELL? WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT? ETC.						

Table 2: Difference in perspectives

	<i>DONOR/DIRECTOR PERCEPTIONS</i>			<i>AID RECIPIENT PERCEPTIONS</i>		
	Donor	NGO staff	Target Population	Donor	NGO staff	Target population
Discussion – What problems exist in our area?						
Prioritization – Make decisions – what are the most pressing concerns?						
Conception – What solutions exist for these problems?						
Planning – Make a plan, assessing resources available.						
Organization – Tasks and timeline finalized; who does what, when?						
Execution – Put our hands together to work, on the ground working						
Follow-through – Supervise work, ensure that it is being done properly						
EVALUATION – ASSESS HOW THE WORK WAS DONE. WHAT WORKED WELL? WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT? ETC.						

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Tigress

by
Kavita Vidya Ganness

I walk the path of freedom
Come join me, my sisters
My slowest stealth is faster
Than any pathetic scheme.
A Tigress lives inside me.

No cage exists to hold me,
My grandeur can never be taken,
The glory of my skin is not for men
To walk on or have as trophy.
A Tigress lives inside me.

Unleashed in every beat of my heart,
Flashing in every blink of these eyes —
Unbridled power. Feminine force.
It's what keeps my fire raging.
A Tigress lives inside me.

In the proud arch of our necks,
We balance majesty and grace.
Greatness is ours. Goddesses we are.
Poetess power and Tigress spirit incite.
A Tigress lives inside me.

Never will my spirit bow,
Skywards will always be my glance,
Verdant is my possibility.
Come join me on this path, my sisters.
A Tigress lives inside me.

Empowerment. Enlightenment.
Independence. Freedom to be...
Our womanhood makes us royalty.
We rule the future with our wombs.
A Tigress lives inside me...



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Water-Sister (For All My Water-Sisters)

by
Kavita Vidya Ganness

Skies are grey and awesome thunder
Shakes our boat and flutters our hearts.

You are here for me, at my side
In this storm, my Water-Sister.

Lightning blinds, the future seems dim,
The wicked wind slaps our tired faces.

Cloaked by the cold rain we are
Yet my Water-Sister does not leave me.

No blood unites us — no family thread exists
Yet our loyalty can never crumble.

Our friendship is our strength, our fortress —
You water my inspiration, my Water-Sister.

When my tears mix with the harsh salt
Of the sea, when my sobs become...

A crescendo of sorrow, when my hope turns
To ashes, my Water-Sister is my oasis.

Cherished friendship — potent womanhood,
Sisterhood of the highest order we are.

I have stood here for you, my Water-Sister
And now you stand for me, you bear for me.

What keeps us together is more than blood,
It's the water of our tears, of our joys.

It's the river of friendship that flows from my heart
To yours, my spirit to yours, my Water-Sister.



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Reflection

Anan Smith

Abstract

Today, when I tell my roommates, all males, that I have stopped watching pornography, they respond in disbelief, “You can’t be serious.” Then, when I tell them how long it has been, they respond, “That’s torture, that’s not natural.” I remember as a young boy, in seventh and eighth grade, the time we discovered porn on the Internet. I was around the age of thirteen. The setting was perfect. Everyday after school about five of the fellas would go to Eduardo’s house, since his parents were not at home. We would talk on the phone, play basketball, light fires, shoot lizards with his BB-Gun, and watch porn. From a very young age, I learned that watching porn was something males did. The sex tape I found in the first house I stayed at in Puerto Rico belonging to the owner of the house, the tapes we found in my friend’s dad’s VCR, and the tapes belonging to my older brother, all told me that watching porn was a natural part of a man’s life; and I believed that it was natural until I took the Men and Masculinities course at the University of the West Indies.

Introduction

Born in Trinidad, but living out of the country since age nine, I returned to Trinidad in January of 2007 on a student exchange program from The Pennsylvania State University. Upon arrival at UWI, I enrolled in four courses; one of them was “Men and Masculinities in the Caribbean”. As a sociology major, I was interested in looking at society from different perspectives. At Penn State, I studied the issue of race and how it shapes the lives of individuals and society as a whole. I saw the study of gender relations as a way to further my understanding of the society in which we live, but it never crossed my mind that this course (Men and Masculinities) would change my way of life.

How “Men and Masculinities” shaped my ideas of manhood

I learned a lot about men’s behavior through this course: male violence, homophobia, heterosexism, the policing of masculinity, notions of masculinity and the list could go on. My housing accommodations during this period also provided the perfect opportunity to reflect on what I was learning in the classroom, as I lived among males in one of the campus halls. Here, I saw every concept that was brought up in class played out in real life. One particular example illuminates some of these concepts.

Apparently years before I had arrived at the hall, there was some sort of show in which a group of people had to get on stage and put on a show in front of an all-male audience. One of the male performers saw it fit to dress up as a woman and dance in front of all these men. As he started dancing, he received whistles and a round of applause from the crowd. Recounting the story, a guy who was in that audience told me what happened. “Boy, when that thing come out in a short dress it looked good. She start to dance and I whistling and enjoying meh self. Is only when she turn around I catch my self and see who it was, see that it was a man. Boy, no lie, I feel to beat that, I feel to kill that.” Here I saw notions of what it meant to be a man. It was OK for him to enjoy the entertainment of what he thought was a woman. In fact, men are encouraged to do this. He liked what he saw until he realized that it was a man, to which he reacted with anger. This anger serves to police masculinity. By saying, “I feel to kill that”, he is saying it is not OK for a man to look at another man with lust. This anger also displays heterosexism and homophobia. Michael Kimmel writes that homophobia is the fear of being unmasked, revealing that you are not the “real man” you pretend to be. In his anger, I saw a man’s fear of being labeled gay by others, and more importantly I saw his fear of revealing to himself that he liked what he saw, that he lusted for another man.

One of the many things I learned about masculinity is that it is relative. There is no absolute way of being a “real man”, yet because we believe there is we set ourselves up for a life of constant posturing and pretending. If you have a good female friend, maybe you have heard a woman’s complaints about her male partner. “He’s just so different when it’s

just the two of us, but when he is with his friends he acts so immature.” Through “Men and Masculinities”, I realized the criteria one has to fit to be a “real man” were not decided by me. Instead, they were decided by other men; thus around other men we exaggerate our male behavior in order to be granted status as a man. I saw also that some of these criteria contradicted others, showing how fragile and unstable this concept of a “real man” is. For instance, a “real man” is supposed to be independent, yet the fact that we depend on other men to validate us, to grant us our status as a “real man”, shows that we are far from being independent, whether we know it or not.

How “Men and Masculinities” changed me

“Men and Masculinities” also gave me the tools to analyze myself and my behavior. As I mentioned above, I, like many other men, started watching pornography at a very young age. As I got older, without knowing it, I started to adopt a view of women as objects, objects to satisfy my sexual needs. Before taking “Men and Masculinities”, I was blind to the way I viewed women. As I became exposed to the readings and concepts in the discourse of gender relations, I began to see how being a man shapes me and my relationships with others. I saw that along with using women as objects for pleasure, be it through watching porn movies or using women for sex, I used women as a way to enhance my status as a man. I looked back at my conversations with other men about sexual experiences with women, only to see that the only reason I did this was to get praise from my friends; and praise is what I got as men are supposed to be loved and love women, and the more women in the picture, the more praise.

Upon seeing how shallow some of my ways of being were, I started looking at my everyday life through gender glasses. I realized that I felt the need to look back at women as they walked past me. During almost every interaction with a female, the thought of sex was on my mind. The dominant ideas in many societies are the ideas of its ruling class. Because we live in a patriarchal society, the ideas dispersed to the masses will portray women in a false and incomplete way. Pornography and the overall representation of women as sex symbols distorted my view of women. I was taught that women were first to be used to fulfill my needs. The view of women as full human beings came second to the view of women as objects. This view (of women as objects) prohibits us from seeing women for who they are. It robs of every interaction its meaning and prevents us from developing meaningful relationships with women.

Not only am I changing the way I view women, but I am also challenging what I thought being a man meant. For example, I once believed that a man should not share his emotions and feelings. Today, however, not only do I share my feelings and emotions with others, but I believe that a “real person” is one who is not bound by unnecessary and unfounded rules such as those of masculinity. Why not share my feelings if they are part of who I am, as a person? Why should I hold misogynistic views if they do not agree with my morals and values? Why should I have to pretend in order for someone else to validate me? Taking the course “Men and Masculinities” made these questions clear to me.

What I will take with me for the rest of my life

One thing I did that played a key role in my “engendered growth” was applying what I learned in class to society, and more importantly to myself. Above all, this is the one thing that I will take with me to my grave, because in doing this I change who I am and I show others that change is possible. In one of my conversations with my roommates, I tried to make them see that the way they treat women is disrespectful. They were talking about their relations with women when I said to them, “The same way you talk about this girl, another guy is talking about your sister.” One of them replied, “I am too old to change.” If I stand for nothing else, I can at least say that change is possible for all of us. The question is, are we ready to make the decision to change?

For me it was not difficult. Nevertheless, it was disappointing to accept that even though I loved and respected women, I was participating in a system that encouraged misogynistic thoughts and behavior. I found liberation, however, in knowing that by acknowledging my ignorance I had empowered myself and was thus able to work towards change.

As a man, it is obviously hard to precisely empathize with my sisters. I cannot understand and grasp exactly how it feels to be a woman in a patriarchal society, simply because I am a man. However, being a black man, among other things, I am able to understand how it feels to be oppressed, exploited, and disrespected. On this very general level, I am able to relate to women’s feelings and conditions, as we are both oppressed in the same world. I read many articles throughout the course, but one in particular was crucial in helping me to make this connection with women. By far the most influential excerpt, and one that continues to impress me today, comes from the book *The Gender Knot*, written by Allan Johnson.

“What men don’t get about gender, white people don’t get about race: whites don’t have to go out of their way to act hatefully in order to participate in a society that produces hateful consequences for people of color. Simply flowing with the mainstream and going about business as usual is enough.”

Just as whites do not have to go out of their way to participate in a society that produces hateful consequences for people of color, men do not have to go out of their way to participate in a patriarchal system that results in the mistreatment and oppression of women. This simple act, the ability to relate to women, is crucial in men’s involvement in the issue of gender relations and in the fight for just treatment of women.

I believe I was blind: blind to the implications of a patriarchal world, blind to my misconceptions about women, and blind to my fundamentally sexist and somewhat misogynistic thoughts, views, and feelings. Before taking the “Men and Masculinities” course, I was not familiar with the discourse of gender relations. Taking the course incited an unimaginable and immense growth in me, something that will stay with me for the rest of my life.



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Forever Indebted to Women: The Power of Caribbean Feminism

Public Lecture – Dominica, April 24, 2008

Patricia Mohammed

Abstract

The attempt to pigeonhole feminism to a specific group of those who work actively towards change in gender equality creates more barriers for the achievement of gender equality and is itself limiting to the success of feminism. It marginalizes those who assume they do not fit into some predetermined criteria. Feminism is not a club you join and to which you pay or are exempted from dues. If it is, then what exactly are its rules of entrance and expulsion and who created these? Is there a venue into which only feminists are allowed? Does one sign on as a lifetime member and can one's views change as the decades change the conditions of desire, pleasure and how one works and lives?

The attempt to date feminism is equally impossible. When exactly did the feminist movement begin and when does it end? Who was the first feminist and who will be the last? And might the feminist movement be taken over and driven by men and the contours be one day shaped by masculinity. How will we know when gender equality is achieved and do we know what gender equality looks like?

Introduction

I have started this lecture with a series of questions, not intending to answer them at all but to engage us all in a different kind of conversation from that we are used to when we consider the questions that gender and feminism are raising in society. The knee-jerk reaction to feminism is that it is about man-hating women who want to do away with men and that gender is a woman thing. Of course, it is a movement for transformation and change that was propelled initially by women, the same way that one expected black people to chart a movement against white supremacy — but change does not follow a predictable path and we are all architects of change during our lifetime. Caribbean feminism in particular has charted its own unique course and will continue to do so. We have adopted and adapted various global feminist ideas and shaped them in our own image, continuously responsive to our own histories and evolving cultures. One of the earliest gender differences that we understood about the region's history and culture was pointed out by Joycelin Massiah when she observed a preponderance of female-headed households, of course more in some territories than others. This was a direct product of African traditions of polygamy carried over and distorted through the process of slavery and its impacts on family and marriage arrangements. As a result, Caribbean gender relations were typified by certain features of independence on women's part and an assumption that the breadwinner and protector role could naturally be that of either sex and not the purview or requirement of one. One of the interesting things that we need to understand about feminism, also, is its specificity and the need to micromanage change and transformation despite commonalities across region or societies. Thus each society also needs to understand and work through the issues that it faces and come to terms with solutions that will work, the same way in which each household knows intimately its secrets and the strengths that each individual brings to its well-being.

In this lecture I want to make a case for us to look at feminism differently and without the clichéd or tarnished lenses that in general are attached to the territory of gender and to see how we are all unwittingly part of a movement that involves gender transformation in society for better rather than for worse. The future power of Caribbean feminism rests in the hands of the many rather than the few to select those aspects that are valuable and necessary to take forward.

The lecture is being given on the island of Dominica, so let me start with this society. This land and country has always held a great fascination for me for several reasons. Perhaps the first was through a default of naming, that it resonates with the name of the first new world city founded by Columbus, that is Santo Domingo, now the capital city of the Dominican Republic. The second is the parallel between Trinidad and Dominica, a first cousin-blend of British, French and African legacies that are evident in the French Creole patois and cuisine which lend a similarity that is comforting and easily recognisable. The third is again located in history in the pleasant discovery that the painter Agostino Brunias, the first resident expatriate painter to depict the Caribbean and the indigenous and early creole populations, had lived and died in Dominica. Brunias, who worked in the Caribbean between 1763 and 1796, has been extensively studied by

Dominican historian Lennox Honeychurch. Brunias was an Italian-born and Italian- and British-trained painter who was retained as a “court artist” by Sir William Young, on the latter’s appointment as first Governor of Dominica in 1763. Dominica and St. Vincent retain a significance for they represent in a sense the first creolization of groups in the English-speaking Caribbean, formed through the union of early Carib populations and African slaves. Brunias left two paintings of this population, *Chatoyer and his five wives*, and *A Family of Charaibes* in the Island of St. Vincent, vastly important in that, although they were processed through the eyes of the artist and the curve of the paintbrush, we see in them evidence of the first creolization of populations that had taken place on these islands, in the union of the Kalinago and Africans. Chatoyer, leader of the Black Carib population, is valuable for our understanding of masculinity in the region. Like Hyarima in Trinidad, a chief of the Carib population whose statue sits in a central position in the town of Arima, Chatoyer represents the collective struggles of masculinity to safeguard the lives and property of their family and community. The protection of family and community as a defined marker of the masculine role has undergone further transformation at present. Some blame this on the scourge of feminism. Others see it as the natural evolution of roles and responsibilities as economic necessity forces each sex to take on further challenges of leadership. Women’s roles as leaders of any sort were, however, virtually silenced in these periods. What we know now is that leadership and responsibility come in many forms and that we must equally privilege the work and labour carried out in the domestic space that bred and fed and reproduced populations.

A fourth reason for my affinity with this island has to do with the coalescence between a literary appeal and the geography of Dominica. A fascination with its wild, natural and almost impenetrable beauty has inspired many writers over the ages; two among them stand out for readers of Dominican literature — Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey. Allfrey’s work and commitment to Dominica combine the marriage of geography with that of the political in one of her poems. “*Love for an island*,” she writes, “*is the sternest passion*.” Writer, poet and left-wing politician, perhaps the first woman in politics that Dominica might claim, she left in her teens for America and England, returning in 1953 after having received literary and political recognition in England. In 1955, she founded the Dominican Labour Party and was Minister of Labour for a short time. As a writer she also stimulated the growth of early journalism, editing the *Dominican Herald* and *The Star*. Would we confer the title of early feminist to Phyllis Shand Allfrey these days for her visibility and presence as a woman in politics, the latter being now a measure of gender equality in a nation, as determined by the United Nations.

The writing and unsettling genius of Jean Rhys, born Ella Gwendolyn Rees Williams in 1890 in Dominica, has drawn many, including myself, to contemplate this island. Rhys was seven years older than Phyllis Shand Allfrey. They maintained a close correspondence with each other. Rhys’s creativity and depiction of Dominica as the unfathomable ghost in her life that refuses to depart are remarkable if only because she invests the reader with a similar sensibility to search for this lingering past in the present. Her relationship to the island is a brooding one, but nonetheless key to her creativity. Antoinette’s voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the voice of her mother’s generation and that of her own, a white creole exactitude of difference as she describes Tia, her black

childhood friend. “Soon Tia was my friend and I met her nearly every morning at the turn of the road to the river... Sometimes we left the bathing pool at midday, sometimes we stayed till late afternoon. Then Tia would light a fire (fires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry). We boiled green bananas in an old iron pot and ate them with our fingers out of a calabash and after we had eaten she slept at once. I could not sleep but I wasn’t quite awake as I lay in the shade looking at the pool — deep and dark green under the trees, brown-green if it had rained, but a bright sparkling green in the sun” (20). Tia betrays her by stealing her clothes, a metaphor for the way Antoinette Cosway is later betrayed by her Caribbean heritage. Yet the same island provides a sanctuary: “I lay thinking, ‘I am safe. There is the corner of the bedroom door and the friendly furniture. There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. The barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers” (23).

What legacy has Jean Rhys to offer to us today that renders her a feminist or a space in feminist history. Her contribution is qualitatively different from that of Shand Allfrey’s or say Dame Eugenia Charles’s, the latter who by definition can boldly wear the mantle of feminism. Yet Rhys’s contribution, like that of the Trinidad-born writer V.S. Naipaul, is responsible for creating the metaphors by which we come to understand the inner life of a culture, the body politic in another way, its corns, self-deceptions and its ambitions. Rhys, in my view, is one of the first feminist authors and theorists that we have produced in the region. Her protagonists, largely weakened and disenfranchised by the cold and solitude as they move out of the tropics, demonstrate the difference of gender and gender norms that existed in the region. By inverting and rewriting the underlying logic behind the madness that is depicted of Rochester’s wife in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, Rhys anticipates the post-modern feminist tongue with which we speak today as we continue to claim ownership of our gendered nuances as a region. Dominica has therefore already produced one of the leading inspirations for those of us who write and record our history of feminist thought and it should be proud of and claim this particular definition of its heritage.

This ongoing relationship with the island of Dominica also encouraged me to work on two gender-related projects which allowed me closer contact and familiarity with the evolving culture of its people. *Caribbean Women and the Crossroads*, published in 1998, was based on a comparative survey of women and decision-making in Dominica, St. Lucia and Barbados, and between 2004 and 2006 the opportunity arose to assist the Women’s Bureau of Dominica in preparing the National Gender Policy on Equity and Equality for this country. This policy is now in its implementation stage and the Women’s Bureau, led by Rosie Browne, must be complimented on its passage from drawing board to actual implementation. Again, the fact that a gender policy was seriously, collectively and consultatively developed with representatives from the trade unions, education, health, social, religion and media sectors, to name a few, must not be understated. Both the serious engagement with gender and the passion to work towards change are a second element of a feminist consciousness that marks out the people of Dominica. Perhaps as Jean Rhys has felt, the fierce and impenetrable beauty requires constant comprehension and protection.

The passage of gender policies, not only in Dominica but in other societies such as the Cayman Islands and Belize, is a welcome feature of contemporary feminism. At the same time, there is the gnawing feeling among many that woman time has come and that it is no longer necessary to have either policies or programmes that are geared specifically for women. The equation of gender with woman a decade or two ago might have been understandable in that feminism itself was viewed primarily as the domain of man haters and female misogynists. It is both puzzling and instructive that the shift of feminism itself, in particular Caribbean feminism, toward openly embracing the concerns of masculinity has not been recognised by society. It is read in a popular sense as if this is another ruse of women to hoodwink men so men must remain wise to the wiles, not be caught in the biblical trap as defined by Eve's temptation of Adam through the intervention of the serpent. I would say that two dominant discourses co-exist. First, that the gender thing, as it is called, is still about women only, for women and on behalf of women. Second, that once an issue is raised under the rubric of gender or feminism, it suffers from an immediate trivialization or, at worst, humouring with unspoken sentiments of let's pacify this constituency by giving them a few concessions. As Thalia Grey, President of the Media Association in Dominica, so nicely put it, somehow feminism has not got across that reading of gender is "an invisible factor which can make a difference to us all". It is the invisibility of how gender works and how it underpins the systemic parts of our lives, such as who rules us, what decisions are made about the welfare of each sex, who determines who is educated and employed and for which jobs and so on. It is also about the personal and individual well being — who looks after our daily needs, who determines our psychological states, who feeds and clothes us with love and affection that is needed in the household and private domain long before we can look for or give this back into public spaces. By and large, the importance of feminism and its goal to achieve gender equality and equity have remained largely unarticulated to many because they are not easy to translate into the common give-and-take language of film, media, public discourses and management structures in institutions. This is why gender and feminism have had closer affinity with institutions that have dealt with so-called gender issues as, for instance, family planning, social work, education — arenas of caring and teaching and nurturing, and so on.

Having said this, it is both unfair and untrue to argue that there has not been significant change in the lives of both women and men because of feminist interventions over the last century and that we have not entered an era where gender difference and distinctions are ignored. At the same time, the problems created by gender differentiation by both men and women persist with alarming continuity and in some cases increased intensity. As we speak, thousands of women are still being herded across borders as sex slaves, most evident but not restricted to women from Africa, Asia and South America. Masculinity is deemed to be in crisis. There is an ever increasing flow of young male gangs with networks that run through continents, increasing levels of violence among young men who feel dispossessed by their countries and by a previous generation. As we also speak, what has been described as a silent tsunami wave of food shortage is sweeping through many societies. For the rich, this simply means an inconvenience of changing tastes, for the poor it means the difference between a hungry or a full belly.

What does this have to do with feminism and gender equality? How have the goals of feminism and what is at stake expanded outside of the normative boundaries that were imposed in the 20th century. In 2000, five years after Beijing, the site of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the goal to eradicate gender inequality had been finally inscribed on the political agenda of most nations of the world, with a fifty percent female participation in political decision-making set as the target for measuring gender equality. But what does it mean to have fifty percent of the leaders in your society being visibly women? I think this question remains one that we must all engage in as Caribbean feminism continues its course.

It is no coincidence that I have also placed the above, fairly lengthy but necessary, preamble into a public lecture hosted by the Trade Union Institute and the Fourth Campus of the University of the West Indies. That women and men in the 21st century have to be conceived equally as workers and intellectuals and are equally apportioned the roles of breadwinner and protector, of nurturer and leader: that is the mutually agreed perception of change that we have again come to take for granted and that I continue to focus our attention on today. I do not think that we have the luxury of differentiating a domestic existence for the male and a public one for the female again. One might argue that this never really existed in practice, but simply in theory, but the two have caught up in this case. For example one of the earliest disturbances in Trinidad that led to the eventual setting up of the Moyne Commission in 1948 and the emergence of Trade Unionism in the Caribbean was that in 1934 by sugar workers. Protesting prolonged unemployment, a group comprising mostly women and children and said to be one that was difficult to control by police was reported in the Port-of-Spain Gazette (Reddock 1994)ⁱ. They were demanding work and food. In the 1930s, the majority of workers in the sugar cane industry were East Indians and thus one might surmise that this vociferous and feisty group were in fact Indian women and children. Similarly in St. Vincent, in 1938, disturbances were as a result of the increase in customs duties. One woman identified as Brenda Bertamatt led the protest in stoning the Kingston courthouse. A reporter described the riot as consisting of fifteen women armed with sticks and stones who were later joined by about two hundred men armed with stones, sledgehammers, cutlasses and knives (Reddock 1990, 90). In Jamaica, in 1938, a large number of working-class women were also involved in strikes and disturbances. Women were active in the waterfront strike on May 21 and were joined by the street cleaners by May 23, and then eventually by the entire city. The *Jamaica Standard* elaborated on the extent of participation of women. Factory workers and packers left their stalls and joined the strikes. They included large numbers of women and girls who joined the demonstration and tried to outshout the men for higher wages and a better standard of living (Reddock, 1990, 95).ⁱⁱ

What I would emphasise, therefore, in sharpening the focus and changing the lens on feminism is that we do not enter this dialogue by positioning women primarily as victims of male patriarchal control. For too long this has served unwittingly or wittingly to keep people in boxes that someone else made. For instance, I have inherited the notion that Indian women are subservient and passive when the lived experience and history of Indian women in the Caribbean goes totally against this grain. To continually depict women as outside the margins of power keeps someone else's power in place. To depict

men as victims of a proscribed, fixed and predetermined masculinity also keeps them and the male sex as vulnerable rather than proactive. For instance, a feminist rereading of the origin story of Christianity questions Adam's role in being duplicitously persuaded by Eve. Did he not have the capacity to make another choice? Let us agree that the vision of gender equality begins with affording each sex the probability of equal choice even while understanding that choices are always curtailed by the possibilities available.

One of the earliest debates that surfaced in feminism when we considered what gender equality might look like is the matter of the division of labour in the domestic space. This discussion, referred to as the Domestic Labour debate, could not be reduced to who did what in the household — rather it brought to light the fact that the sexual division of labour that assumed that housework was the domain of women and work outside the house that of men, was a false dichotomy that affected women's and men's chances in the workplace. One example is that for years men were restricted from the component of midwifery in the nursing profession. That false dichotomy that women only are capable of nurturing has also made for the acceptance of maternity leave as a normative requirement of women, not of course won without a struggle from employers. But it has also militated against the question of paternity leave. When the question of paternity leave is brought up, invariably the response is either that it will be abused by men or that they do not need to be given leave for the birth of their children. In fact, and as an aside, the issue always raises a certain amount of levity in the Caribbean, on the assumption that men are entitled to many partners and thus may have more than one child within a normal calendar year. These are not superficial concerns. What they mean in terms of a philosophy of gender equality is that one is restricted by choice as a result of biology. We must recall that biology also provided an argument for the enslavement of Africans, that black brains were smaller than European ones. Writ differently by contemporary philosophers Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the question that is being posed here is what are the rights and freedoms that must be available to each human being, that are dependent on their capabilities and needs, and not restricted by their biological sex or social circumstances. The domestic labour debate raised many issues that have remained unsettled and that underpin feminist discourses, among them not only who does what job, but what value is accorded to various tasks in society. I think it is time we return to this debate seriously and reconsider some of the old tenets and see their continued if not greater relevance to some of the issues that remain unresolved today.

It is an apposite time to pay homage also to the work of a Caribbean woman who spent the greater part of her adult life ensuring that the issue of housework remained on the agenda. In 1965, Clotil Walcott began her activities in the Labour Movement by joining the Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers in Trinidad. Her experience of the lack of agency that workers suffered in their bid to gain recognition, both in national legislation and representation through the trade unions which represented them, led her to become further trained in trade union bargaining and to take on positions of leadership. She undertook an overseas correspondence course in Industrial Relations, gaining certificates in Trade Union Law, Shop Steward Duties, Industrial Negotiations, Industrial Law and Collective Bargaining. On March 13, 1974, she was elected shop steward by the union members in her department for the National Union of Government and Federated

Workers which she had by this time joined. She combined her union activities with an active political one, seeing them as indivisible in the struggle for rights and freedoms. During the period 1969–1972, she became a member of NJAC — the National Joint Action Committee and participated in the Black Power and black consciousness movement which swept Trinidad (Reddock 2007)ⁱⁱⁱ. In 1974, Clotil along with her close friend and comrade Brother James Lynch, Salisha Ali and others established The National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) as a section of the Union of Ship Builders, Ship Repairers and Allied Workers Union (USSR). The bulletin announcing its formation stated, “Calling all persons serving in the capacity of cooks, kitchen helpers, maids, butlers, seamstresses, laundresses, barmen, babysitters, chauffeurs, messengers, yardmen and household assistants”, heralding the union’s concern with low-income workers more generally in addition to domestic workers, broadly defined. In 1982, NUDE registered as a union in its own right under the Trades Unions Ordinance. Although she and others had won the right to organise a trade union for domestic and related workers, to this day household assistants are not recognised as workers. Nonetheless, some gains were achieved, among these (1) the passing of the Minimum Wages and Terms and Conditions of Service for Household Assistants Order, under the Minimum Wages Act November 1982, which allowed for minimum wages, a 44-hour work week, overtime rates for public holidays, maternity leave and vacation leave for those workers represented; and (2) the passage of the Unremunerated Work Act, 1995, which allows for the counting of unwaged work in national statistics. This made Trinidad and Tobago one of the first countries in the world to pass such legislation and the Trinidad and Tobago wording for the Act was used as the model for the Beijing Declaration on Women. Clotil had taken this debate to an international level and gained recognition for Trinidad and Tobago in the 1995 World Conference of Women in Beijing as a leader in societies that had begun to recognise the importance of accounting for domestic work and related household services deemed unpaid work in their Gross Domestic Product.

Clotil died in late 2007, leaving another tremendous legacy and a body of unfinished work. It is useful to pass this baton on to Dominica which has so seriously engaged in the quest for gender equality and equity in this society. The Protection of Employment Act Chapter 89:02 of the Revised Laws of Dominica provides protection for all categories of workers at present but Section (4) states, “Parts II and III do not apply to or in respect of the employment of a person as a domestic servant.” This means that domestic servants, who are still predominantly female, are excluded from receiving pay as a result of termination on the grounds of redundancy. This remains, therefore, a discriminatory act. The Labour Contracts Act Chapter 89:04 of the revised Laws of Dominica, Section 3, provides that every employer not later than fourteen (14) days after assumption of employment, must enter into a labour contract with employee detailing the terms and conditions of employment. However, Section 2 (3) (g) and (h) exclude home assistants and agricultural workers from this provision. Again, this Section of the law is gender biased as the bulk of persons employed as home assistants and agricultural workers are women. Furthermore, home assistants and agricultural workers are not unionized and consequently cannot act in concert to advocate changes for their conditions of

employment. The National Gender Policy on Gender Equality and Equity¹ calls for investigation and subsequent informed strategies to deal with the situation of home assistants and agricultural workers, a class of employees who are most vulnerable to abuses of employment. Among its recommendations are the following:

Policy No 18 calls for an urgent review of the two above-stated pieces of legislation, The Protection of Employment Act Chapter 89:02 and The Labour Contracts Act Chapter 89:04 and the provision of necessary mechanisms to ensure compliance.

Policy No 19 advocates for discussions with labour personnel with a view to the unionization of the category of workers comprising home assistants and agricultural workers.

And relatedly, the Dominica gender policy is committed to enhancing the conditions under which men might be willing to accept such responsibilities and play equal or complementary roles to women in the nurturing and parenting of children. Recognising that some unions (namely WAWU) in Dominica have negotiated paternity leave provisions in their Collective Agreements, Policy No 24 advocates the need for unions to educate the public and lobby government to include this provision in law as a basic entitlement, noting that such education and discussion should also extend to the penalties for abuse of this leave. We might in discussions consider the very real economic, social and legislative implications of unionizing domestic work, accounting for it in GDP calculations and granting paternity leave to men. The fullness of these is both beyond my immediate competence and also will require input from different sectors and professions.

In raising the issue as a key and strategic entry and exit point in this lecture, I have also asked myself why did I focus on these two issues, that is, the recognition of domestic workers through unionization or other practices that ensure their access to fair and equitable working conditions and the consideration of paternity leave for men. It derives from a very simple observation. I have pondered the fall out or backlash, if you like, of the struggle for women to gain ascendancy in society. We need to admit that the battle to consider women as workers who earn a living and need a wage equivalent to men's has been won by the 21st century. We need only look around at the workplace, the media industry, the professions, the proliferation of women in education and in the health sectors to recognise that while we need to remain consistently vigilant of conditions, we can move on. In winning this right of equal recognition, feminism has also imposed another set of burdens on the household — the double burden of competencies and excellence as caregiver, homemaker and professional that are required of those who combine service to the workplace and the domestic environment. To do this, many women, like myself, have required helpers: Cynthia's, and Mavis's, and Girlsins, cleaners and cooks and baby carers who must take our places, while having to take care of their own houses and families. Women we trust with our houses, our possessions, the food that

¹ *The National Gender Policy on Equity and Equality for the Commonwealth of Dominica*, prepared by Patricia Mohammed, Consultant to the Government of Dominica, Deborah Mc Fee and Committee of Representatives from Ministries and NGOs in Dominica, 2006

they put on our plates. How does a society begin to deal with the changing landscape of work and family so that the burdens are not visited on another generation. We see its results in the growing delinquency of masculinity and the challenges that are presented to young women to understand their sexuality at a very early age. Parental care now requires not just feeding and clothing and monitoring homework, but surveillance over Internet sites, cable television and action to safeguard against drugs. Since both sexes are providers and protectors, it requires that we imagine the concept of masculinity and femininity differently from that which we inherited as far as parenting is concerned, as far as household and domestic life is concerned, as far as the smallest cell of society which is the household and family, and where the young learn to become productive and disciplined adults.

This lecture thus ends on a rhetorical note. Gender must return us constantly to the common denominator of what it is to be human and to learn what fairness and equity really means. Those lessons are learnt from very early. A mother and father do not feed and clothe one child and ignore the other, even though they may be differentiated by concepts of beauty or capacities. It is often said of people with disabled children that they learn love through such children far more as the disabled require and reciprocate more of this quality. Societies must also learn to do the same. Caribbean feminism must be constantly the conscientious watchdog on our domestic practices in the face of growing global threats that, being dots in the ocean, we are incapable of reversing. And all of us need to become part of this conscience, not just women. Gender must no longer be “dis woman thing”.

ⁱ Rhoda Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1994).

ⁱⁱ Rhoda Reddock. “Feminism, Nationalism and the Early Women’s Movement in the English-Speaking Caribbean (with special reference to Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago)” in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, ed. Selwyn Cudjoe, (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux Publications, 1990).

ⁱⁱⁱ From an obituary tribute to Clotil Walcott presented by Rhoda Reddock at services held in her honour.



The University of
the West Indies
Centre for Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

Gnawing at the Seams: Challenges for Contemporary Jamaican Feminism and the Equality Question*

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Abstract

Long before the term “feminism” existed, women always sought opportunities for social and economic empowerment, whether through welfare-oriented schemes or through other forms of activism. The 1970s Caribbean experience marked significant developments in feminism where women advocated, and through those efforts, permeated state institutions to achieve legal shifts in the interest of themselves and their children. During that era, both local and global women’s activism converged to address issues of inequality and discrimination and, as a result, reaped positive results where basic reforms were concerned. In Jamaica, there was extensive legal reform as several new laws were enacted as well as amendments made to existing laws. This was especially significant in the matters related to equality of pay despite sex, legitimizing the status of all children, maintenance, maternity leave, *inter alia*. Although these were major achievements, there were still issues that continued to contribute to asymmetrical gender relations. This paper, therefore, discusses how women’s achievements within a patriarchal space were not indicative of changes in conventional gender ideologies; more importantly, it questions the extent to which the legacy of the past, by itself, within the context of women’s

* An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the Seventh Annual Conference, “Social Policy Challenges in the Post-Independence Era”, Barbados, March 29–31, 2006.

achievement and women's politics, is capable of charting new directions for contemporary feminism.

Introduction

Contemporary Caribbean societies have emerged from the historical processes of colonial oppression, and activism for social and political transformation has always been part of the history as well as part of Caribbean sociocultural experiences. This has had an impact on the ways in which Caribbean women and men understand, and relate to, issues of oppression and survival. The agitation for suffrage in the early twentieth century, for example, underscored that women were aware of the social and political inequalities, and how the denial of rights marginalized their social existence. The activism also highlighted that they understood the value of women's political participation, and that social change would come through their own efforts to transform the space in which they lived. Women's achievement in winning the vote was significant but marginal, as the majority of women were disenfranchised by the law that excluded those of the lower social strata. Only women of the elite class, with property that was at least twice the size of those owned by men, were considered worthy of the vote (Vassell 1993). The significance of women's franchise was embodied in the fact that patriarchy had relented, and women could actually see the worth of women's collective organizing. The activism demonstrated that state institutions could be permeated despite their seeming to be monolithic with respect to control, governance and power.

This earlier liberal approach to feminism (though it may not have been called *feminism* then) which focused on institutional shifts, was reflected in the agitations for social transformation at different periods leading into the decade of the 1970s. One outstanding example is the advocacy for reforms in 1938, when women such as Mary Morris Knibb and Edith Clarke (Moyne Commission Report) petitioned the Moyne Commission to make legislative changes that would improve the social conditions of poor women and children (West India Royal Commission Report 1945). There were several proposals for legislative change—for example, to amend the existing Maintenance Law in an attempt to address matters related to *illegitimacy* (a status assigned to children born out of wedlock); to address issues of paternity and the maintenance of children. That women's advocacy focused on these issues suggests that women were aware of the impracticability of the colonial laws in dealing meaningfully with the issues of Caribbean family and women's social existence.

After universal adult suffrage was won in 1944, and a new Constitution was institutionalized, the discriminatory nature of the laws persisted and fomented continued activism. This discrimination was evident in the Laws of Jamaica as they existed in 1944, with particular reference to laws such as the Work Permit Law that disallowed women from passing citizenship to their children; the Bastardy Law that created categories of children in relation to each other, by ceding rights and opportunities based on the marital status of parents; the Maintenance Law that placed the burden of proof of paternity squarely on the shoulders of women, and other anomalies despite the establishment of a new Constitution. Women's journey, therefore, into the 1970s would have been long and hard. It should not be surprising that committees such as the Cumper Committee and the Law Reform Committee emerged in the early '70s. The Women's Desk (later renamed

the Bureau of Women's Affairs) was institutionalized as early as 1973, prior to the United Nations Decade for Women 1975–1985 (Reddock 1998).

The path of feminism in Jamaica was clear in the 1970s. There was a deviation from the earlier forms of welfare-oriented activism such as that adopted by the Jamaica Federation of Women (Vassell 1993). The establishment of the Women's Desk in 1973, in the Office of the Prime Minister, was the corollary of the activism of Mavis Gilmour and Lucille Mathurin Mair. Indeed, the institutionalizing of the Women's Desk (renamed the Bureau of Women's Affairs) was one of the firsts in the world (Reddock 1998). These women had demanded state intervention in addressing the social and economic difficulties of poor women. This visionary move challenged the power structures from within, signaling that women understood state capacities, and the ways in which opportunities may be linked to state political ideologies. Comparisons may be drawn between the achievements of women in Jamaica in the 1970s under democratic socialism and the achievements of women in Guyana in the 1970s under cooperative socialism—which will not be discussed in this paper.

Feminists have always argued concerning the patriarchal nature of states, and the extent to which there can be reform in the male-centeredness of the power structure. This is linked to how states tend to use the rule of law to position masculinity in relation to femininity, which in turn underscores the ways in which laws help to shape ideologies, and also determine the nature of women's social existence. That women must turn to the State for redress is paradoxical, although the establishment of legal structures is a first step in the inculcation of new notions to confront women's differential participation. Clearly there are dangers in leaving the administering of justice to the patriarchal State, and similarly, there is jeopardy in State-run feminist structures. Anderson Manley (1991) pointed out the danger as feminism runs the risk of becoming “part of the same patriarchal process that denies women their rights,” The harmonization of feminist interests with the interests of the State is oxymoronic, and threatens the possible co-option of feminism by the State. Anderson Manley's reference to the failure of the Bureau of Women's Affairs throughout the Caribbean to get substantive support from the respective governments, highlighted the peripheral treatment of women's interests by states. This failure brings into question the custodianship of women's gains by the patriarchal State, but also challenges the local women's movement to find ways to protect the victories won by women's collective organizing. Indeed, the energies exerted by past women's activists, how they confronted the issues, how the women's movement was experienced by activists and by other groups, and women's gains through reforms, spoke volumes concerning the visibility and the success of the advocacy.

The contemporary situation does not suggest a level playing field with respect to issues of inequality and justice, despite the reforms of the past. Issues of domestic violence, incest, rape, abortion, substantive representation of women in Parliament and other structures, among others, still prevail. Though a few women tend to be in the forefront in the contemporary Jamaican situation, such as through their participation in Beijing Plus Five, a corollary of the Decade for Women 1975–1985, the silence across women's organizations, the incoherence, the inconsistent nature and sporadic moments of

advocacy, force those who are not in denial to admit some dysfunctionality in the contemporary Jamaican women's movement. The big question is, where have all the feminists gone? (Castello 2006) Other questions are, have we passed the baton on to the State to address the women's issues, given that women's past gains were mainly institutionalizations within the power structures of the State? Are we so satisfied with the reforms of the past that any other difficulties are minute, and in time, will naturally be righted? Have we run out of gas? Do we now feel that equality is reached given women's educational achievements in institutions of higher learning?

In defining the contemporary women's movement, Taylor (1986) noted that it encompasses a proliferation of independent organizations, with ideological heterogeneities and goals that are loosely connected by overlapping memberships and networks. This points to a flat organizational structure that is capable of supporting decentralized leadership, and as such, increased autonomy should emerge. This particular structure is expected to enhance capacity for the expansion of goals within the context of collective organizing and advocacy. Though the contemporary women's movement should have all the features to support effective and substantive representation of Jamaican women, the invisibility and inaudibility despite the issues suggest that there is an empty space to be filled. In fact, women's past achievements and the ways in which women networked with the State for reforms in their interest should have indicated to contemporary activists the capacities of the transformative potential of feminism. Hence this phase of invisibility needs further research. It may be debatable as to whether the complexities concerning the sociocultural environment and patriarchy, the power relations, modernity and globalization, to name a few, may have intertwined to create an environment of diverse foci in which women's concerns are not necessarily central.

A survey conducted in 2004, by Shakira Maxwell, showed that students pursuing courses in gender at the University of the West Indies, Mona campus, were not aware that a feminist movement exists. This information is important as it highlights the dormancy of the movement. Though I do not claim to have all the answers, I would like to posit that the flatness in the organizational structure of the movement, and the fact that there is no clear structure which ensures centralized focus on pressing issues, may have contributed to the seeming fragmentation and incoherence. I also posit that a Jamaican feminist tradition of liberalism may now have led to the co-option of feminism within the structures of the State. This may be linked to the economic dependence of Jamaica on international funds and the limited resources for feminist initiatives. The other dimension could be that women's educational achievement in institutions of higher learning (as noted in the UWI Student Admission, Registration and Graduation 2007/8 Statistics) may have encouraged women into professional capacities, leaving a void for outreach activists. While nothing is wrong with women's search for social and economic power, it is also imperative that the substantive representation of women by other groups of women is not clouded by the personal politics of class and limited opportunities. It is within this context that a new category of "feminists" may have emerged—*femnocrats*. The term *femnocrats* refers to educated women who have strategically placed themselves in positions of power in some women's organizations. These are women who were never involved in the activism of the past, have no particular interest in the issues of the present

outside of issues that facilitate their enlightened self-interest. They have not made any significant contribution to the feminist struggle and have little, if any, commitment to the cause. They create parallel patriarchal cultures in their work spaces in which the subordinates are underpaid, undervalued, overworked and oppressed. This may have resulted from a Movement that has not been structured to include mechanisms of accountability.

bell hooks' (1989) critique of the contemporary women's movement pointed to its emergence, as that which came out of a commitment to eliminate sexism, but hooks posited that the positioning of the movement within a larger cultural framework has served to contradict its broader aim for collective change. bell hooks, in her observation of the contemporary women's movement, noted as follows:

“...Initially I believed that the women who were active in feminist activities were concerned about sexist oppression and its impact on women as a collective group. But I became disillusioned as I saw various groups of women appropriating feminism to serve their own opportunistic ends. Whether it was women university professors crying sexist oppression (rather than sexist discrimination) to attract attention to gain promotion; or women using feminism to mask their sexist attitudes; or women writers superficially exploring feminist themes to advance their own careers, it was evident that eliminating sexist oppression was not the primary concern...” hooks (1989)

The importance of this critique is that it brings into full view an observation that is not Caribbean but still has relevance in the Caribbean. It suggests that the phenomenon is not unique to the Caribbean, but that there are challenges in some directions of contemporary feminism. Given that the interest of feminism is to transform the lives of poor women, then shouldn't there be measures to ensure that female leaders in feminist organizations are committed? Shouldn't the pastor be a Christian, the Pujari, a Hindu, the Houshi-sama, a Buddhist, and the activists and leaders in the Women's Movement, feminist? In fact, interviews conducted with 60 percent of female employees in three women's organizations in Jamaica headed by women, highlighted that the workers were distressed by the harsh work environments (Shirley 2006). The comments made by female staff ranged from unclear hiring and promotion policies to no succession planning, among other complaints. That female workers working in three separate situations had anti-feminist experiences in spaces supposedly run by “feminists”, *gnaws at the seams of Jamaican feminism*. If women's experiences were to be treated as empirical knowledge, then support must be given to “the concept that less powerful members (individuals and groups) are potentially capable of a more complete view of social reality than the privileged, precisely because of their disadvantaged positions” (Baksh-Soodeen 1998). The intersection of different experiences theoretically challenges the notion of subjective analysis. It points to lost opportunities for the movement to harness the support of women, as obtained in the past when organizations such as the Committee of Women for Progress and the People's National Party (PNP) Women's Movement garnered mass support in the struggle for reforms in the 1970s (Interview with Anderson Manley 2005).

It may be argued that these experiences may be linked to the sociocultural issues of classism and oppression which transcend commitments to social transformation. This is evidenced in the work of Linnette Vassell (1993), which illustrated that the legacies of colonialism have had adverse effects on the history and path of feminism in Jamaica. She noted the visionary move of black feminists in Jamaica to establish the Save the Children Fund in 1938, that emerged as a result of the need to bypass the hurdles that were erected by white feminists in Jamaica. To take a step closer, the Minimum Wage legislation was resisted by some middle-class women in the PNP Women's Movement in the 1970s which led to dissension in the organization (Henry 1986). Though it may be argued that their apprehension may have been guided by their position as employers, the fact that they dissented underscored their priorities and challenged the substantive representation of poor women by other groups of women. Closer yet, the political campaign for PNP Party leadership in Jamaica, in 2005, squarely pointed to the difficulties in the social class phenomenon. Portia Simpson, the first female to run for president in the People's National Party, was not supported by the PNP Women's Movement, not even for her symbolism. In an article in the *Sunday Gleaner* entitled "Beware Endimities and PhDs For Hire", the journalist Dawn Ritch wrote the following:

"She (Portia) won against the political status quo, the party machinery, the media and the intelligentsia. All the PNP women's organizations lined up solidly behind Dr. Peter Phillips or Dr. Omar Davies, to say nothing of an endless string of female celebrities from the party, beginning from Maxine Henry Wilson, Beverley Anderson Manley... There was no feminist enthusiasm for Portia whatsoever... her victory was a plain and straight revolt by the grassroot for a human centred approach to governance..." (March 19, 2006)

The lack of support by the feminist movement pointed to the ways in which conventional gender ideologies are complexly intertwined in the issues of class and identity. It highlighted the schisms between groups of women, the personal politics of group identity and how these are connected to understandings of femininity and women's capacities.

In recalling the social experiences of the granting of early suffrage rights, the contemporary understandings of femininity and difference may also be linked to the history of class discrimination that was supported by the state laws which determined how gender should be governed. The Machiavellianism, in terms of how groups of women selectively support other groups of women, evident in the Portia scenario, the politics of the PNP Women's Movement in the 1970s, and in the contemporary, the treatment of working-class women by women in positions of power in some women's organizations are all evidence of class discrimination. The flip-flop between class prejudices and issues of empowerment presented a challenge for some women. In the case of Portia Simpson, Dawn Ritch noted that Portia's support was from the grassroots which brings into question elitist perspectives on grassroot leadership capacities. But more importantly, it draws a parallel to the patriarchal ideologies which predetermine women's roles based on the understanding of women's capacities. Although it may be

argued that feminism in the '70s was led by the middle-class, it may also be debated how far middle-class women were willing to go, given the dissension that arose over the Minimum Wage legislation which would have benefited poor women (Henry 1986).

Conclusion

That female university students who were studying gender were not aware of the existence of the women's movement indicates that the movement had become obscure. The mirroring of patriarchal cultures in a few women's organizations led by women highlighted a weakness in the movement, that suggests the need for greater accountability. The *immobility* of a movement suggests stasis, and calls for a new era that will continue to chart new directions in the interest of women's empowerment. The new era must acknowledge that the issues of the past are still much a part of the present and the future. It should value legacies of the past with a view to creating new ones, as the movement is not sacrosanct. It continues to be a work in progress in a changing environment where new and different issues will emerge. Women's gains ought not to be trivialized nor memorialized as primeval achievements within the fluidity of social and political change but should be recognized as fundamental to a social project that is not yet completed.

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Interview with undergraduate students (pursuing courses in gender and development studies) of UWI, Mona Campus, by Shakira Maxwell, 2004.

Interview with three women's organizations in Jamaica by author (anonymity of organizations requested by interviewees), 2006.

Interview with Beverley Anderson-Manley by author. Jamaica Pegasus Hotel, Kingston, Jamaica, 2005.

Newspaper articles

"Women and the Franchise: Agitation for Vote in Jamaica has Aroused Interest in England." *Daily Gleaner*, March 8, 1919.

"Bustamante Threatens a Great Strike." *Daily Gleaner*, September 19, 1938.

"Beware Endimities and PhDs for hire." *Sunday Gleaner*, March 19, 2006.

Daily Gleaner, February 6 –May 18, 1974.

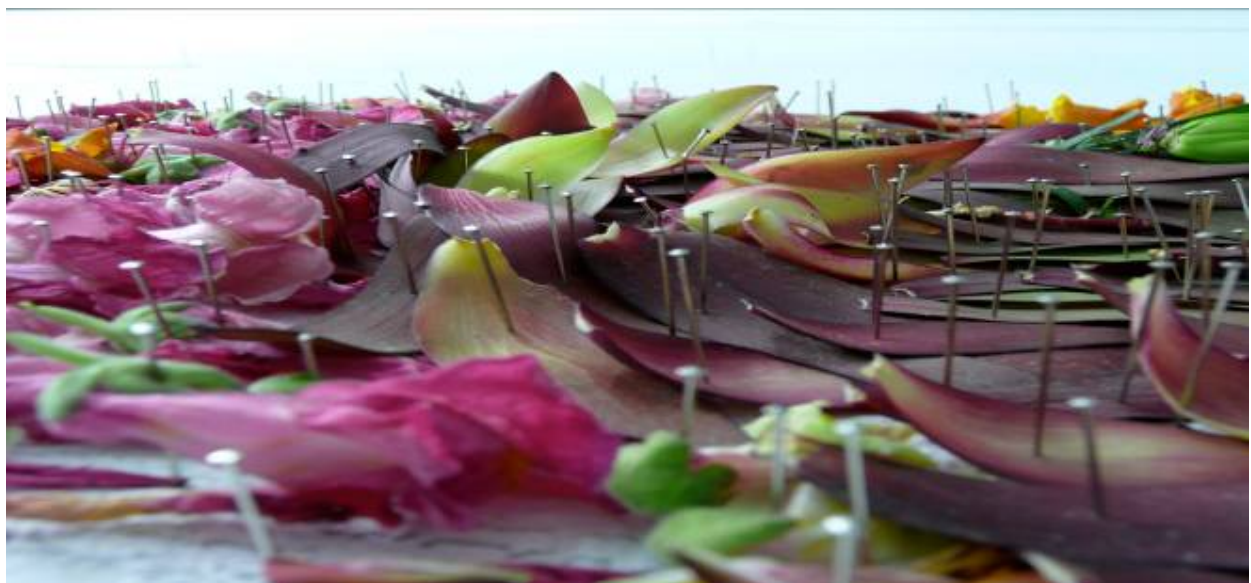


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Recent Work by Jaime Lee Loy: UnFamiliar



In Late 2007 Jaime Lee Loy began working with the domestic space as a site of war, exploring the psychological crisis that occurs, when something familiar becomes suddenly unfamiliar. Her installation and performance 'The Roach,' was the first of this body of work. Part of 'Roaches and Flowers: War in the home', Lee Loy used real flowers that were delivered to her studio at The Vermont Studio Centre. Struggling with feelings of fear, repulsion, and anxiety, she created a large insect from the petals that she pinned painstakingly with silk pins to the wall. The insect was then photographed in different stages of decay. Landscapes of pins and petals were also made from this installation.

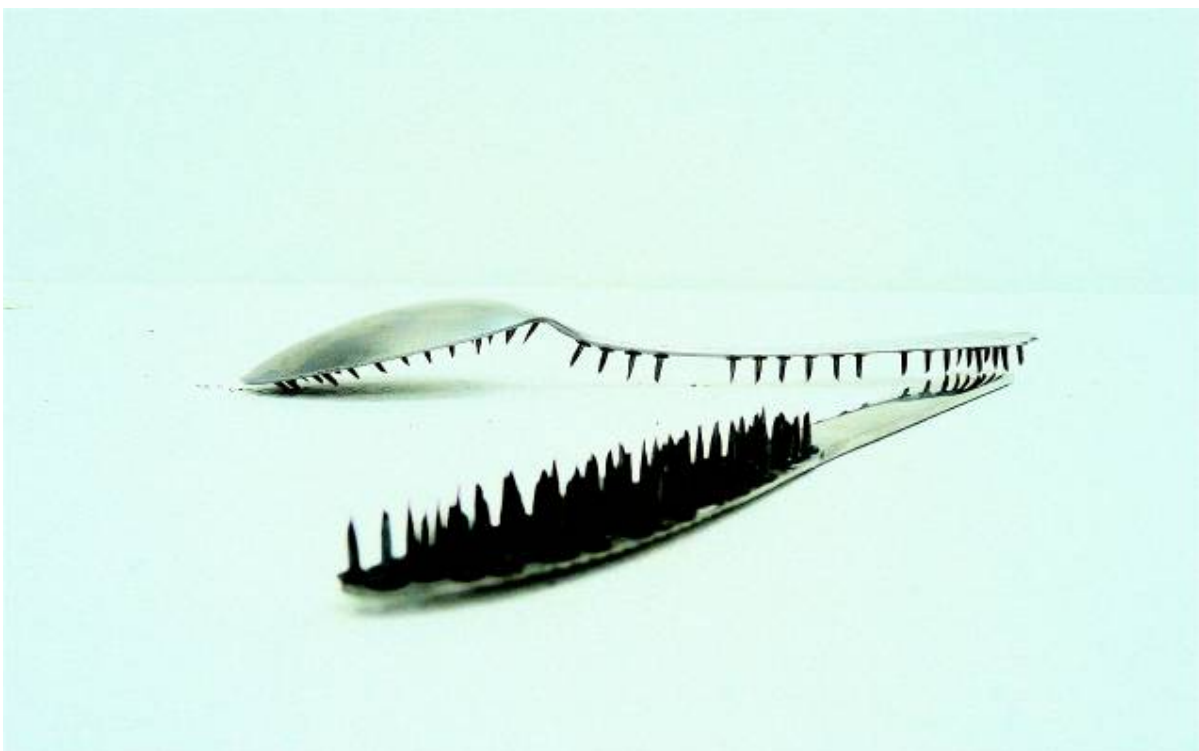


Lee Loy then began to navigate a visual landscape within the physicality of a typical house structure. Here the house began to come alive to speak secrets of abuse, the battle for space and territory, the negotiations of survival, and the politics of the personal. Here the female subject and the female artist herself finds agency and defence tactics through the personification of domestic items as insects. Spoons and forks, plates and flowers – they become roaches, they become weapons. These images, these created spaces generate an unfamiliar feel in a familiar space, they are simultaneously ugly as they are beautiful.



'The Race' – From Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home

'Metamorphosis' – From Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home



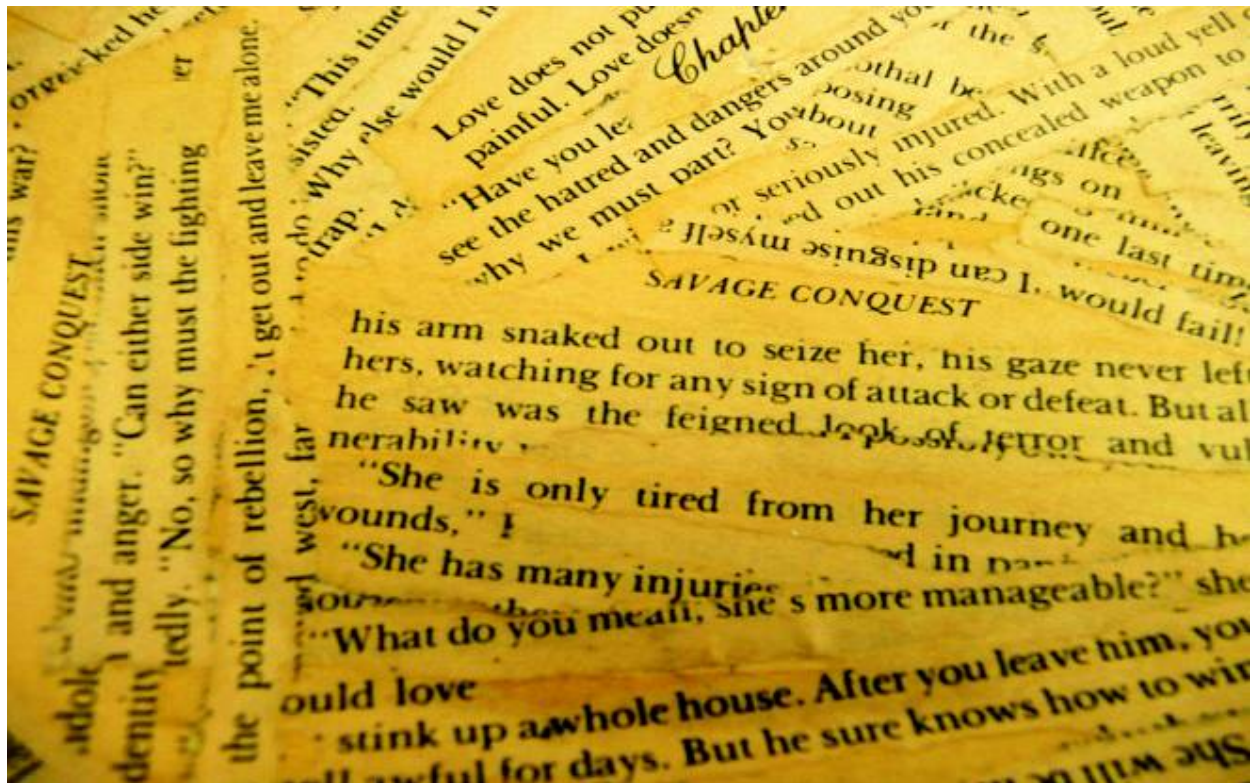
'Conversation Piece' was constructed from a second-hand book found in a garage sale in Vermont. 'Savage Conquest' was one of those stereotypical novels housewives supposedly read. The plot involved a wealthy European female who visited an untouched island to pursue a torrid love affair with an indigenous male. Her furious fiancé follows her to wage war on the islanders. This type of book that creates fantasies and promotes myths about relationships and desire is being interrogated alongside the domestic space- another facilitator of myth and idealism.

Stripping the book sentence by sentence, Lee Loy pasted excerpts that referred to a physical war to create a psychological one. Key sentences were used to totally cover the plate, which was then installed in her studio on a table set with cutlery, wine glasses, and a serving tray of clams.



'Conversation Piece' – From Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home

Detail of 'Conversation Piece' – *From Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home*



'A Meal of Clams' (detail from Conversation Piece)– *From Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home*



'I Bought You Flowers' – *From Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home*

The domestic space, a place associated with comfort and notions of belonging, continues to become more alienating and complex. There is an intense emotive response to such a transition of the physical and psychological realm that shifts incessantly from the familiar to the unfamiliar. This emotive response exists in the ephemeral and in the metaphysical. The construction of creatures that simultaneously mimic the appearances of flowers and roaches offer new codes, new language, new translation to the realities within which they exist.



'The Venus Trap' - From Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home

These creatures are found in domestic spaces at a point of transition, at a point of collapse and decay. They scurry through the rubble strategically, transforming from prey to predator, blurring the distinction. The landscape changes to an 'Alice in Wonderland,' Kafkaesque world, where these creatures interact with each other, with themselves, and with no one.



"Talk to me" - Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home



'Venus' - From Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home



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Living Ancestors

by
Gabrielle Le Roux



Aya

Anastasia Thomas, known as Aya lived in Soufriere, Dominica. She was born on the 6th of September 1901. She was 100 years old when Gabrielle Le Roux met, interviewed and drew her in 2001.

Aya was known for her outstanding skill as a bele dancer, she wore her traditional dance clothes for her portrait.



Ma Pampo

Elizabeth Israel, better known as Ma Pampo lived in Glanvillia, Portsmouth, Dominica. She was born 27 January 1875 and died on October 17th 2003 at the age of 128. She was 126 years old when she sat for this portrait in 2001.

Ma Pampo attributed her good longevity to hard work, the natural food she ate, God and her philosophy of living in peace with the people around her.



Didi

Virginia Barry, known as Didi lived in Glanvillia, Portsmouth, Dominica. She was 101 years old but her exact birthdate was not available when I visited.

Didi was Ma Pampo's first cousin and although she was over a hundred she was twenty five years younger years younger than her.



Ma Morol

Josine Nicely Bernadette Valmond was known as Ma Morol. She lived in Sineku where the survivors of the Caribs, some of Dominica's earliest inhabitants live. She was born on 22 November 1901 and was 100 years old when we met. She was skilled at the kind of basket and mat weaving practiced in that area.



Ma John

Marian Younger Virgile, known as Ma John lived in Marigot, Dominica. She was born 10 July 1901 and was 100 years old in 2001.

Ma John had worked for many years on Melville Hall Estate shelling copra and lost an eye chopping wood.



Aunty Rose

Rose Peters, known in her community as Aunty Rose or Ma Rose lived in Glanvillia, Portsmouth, Dominica. She was born the 21st February 1883. She was 118 years old when she sat for this portrait in 2001 and she died just a couple of months later on September 28th the same year.

When she saw the portrait Aunty Rose said she found it looked like her: "But I find you made me look a little bit old!"



Memen

Felicite Hogan was known both as Memen and Ma William. She lived in Goodwill, Roseau, Dominica. She was born 8 March 1901 and was 100 years old in 2001.

Memen had sixteen children but only four of them grew to adulthood. She had worked all her life as a farmer.



Ma Bradley

Elize Phillips was called Leela, Moda and Ma Bradley in her community. She lived in Wesley, the area of Dominica where Creole is not spoken. She was 113 years old when she agreed to be drawn for this project.

Ma Bradley was deeply moved to know that her portrait was going to be seen in Africa, she said it was the only way she would return there.



Ma Cuffy

Nellie Cuffy, known as Ma Cuffy lived in Goodwill, a suburb of Roseau, the capital of Dominica. She was born on 26 September 1900 and was 101 years old in 2001.

Ma Cuffy said that she would like to be remembered as: "A beautiful woman, a good woman and a woman with good friends".



Ama

Evelina Nation was known as Ama and lived in Castle Bruce, Dominica. She was born 18 February 1898 and was 104 years old when I drew her.

Ama had eleven children, a hundred and ten grandchildren, about a hundred and fifty great grandchildren and ten great-great grandchildren.



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Overview of the Nita Barrow Collection

Carmen Hutchinson Miller

Abstract

The information in this article is an overview of the vision, coordinating, planning, negotiating, and final establishment of the Nita Barrow Collection in the Cave Hill library at the University of the West Indies, under the leadership of Head of the Centre, Dr. Eudine Barriteau¹. All the information was gathered from the Centre for Gender and Development Studies: Nita Barrow Unit² and includes internal documents such as letters, departmental reports, project proposals, and other relevant documents.

¹ Dr. Eudine Barriteau is head of the Centre since its establishment in 1993. She subsequently received her professorship in 2004.

² The Centre for Gender and Development Studies, Cave Hill Unit, was renamed The Centre for Gender and Development Studies: Nita Barrow Unit on November 15, 2006.

Introduction

Since as a historian I recognize the importance of documenting the events and activities of a people for posterity, it is my heartfelt desire that the general history of the Centre for Gender and Development (CGDS) should be documented and published as another contribution not only to academia but to the future men and women who will be leading Caribbean society. Academic interactions such as these, it is my hope, will create necessary motivation for such scholarly undertaking.

Overview

The Nita Barrow Specialist Collection is part of the Research Project, Caribbean Women Catalysts for Change (CWCC), which was conceptualized in 1993/1994. The other two aspects of the CWCC research project is the distinguished lecture series which was inaugurated in 1995 and a continuous documentation work that researches, documents, and disseminates information on the public life and contributions of outstanding Caribbean women in six selected areas which represent six phases.

Caribbean Women Catalysts for Change Lecture Series

The lecture series was inaugurated in 1995 by Dame Eugenia Charles of Dominica, and in 1996 was dedicated to honouring the memory of Dame Nita Barrow, Governor General of Barbados, 1990–1995. The lecture series is now in its thirteenth year. Twelve of the thirteen lectures planned were delivered (see lecture no. 3 in table). Several of the lectures have been published in the Working Paper Series³.

Research project on outstanding Caribbean women

The CWCC has six research phases and one continuous documentation phase. These research phases are as follows:

- Regional and international development
- Politics and political participation
- Women organizing and the women's movement
- Trade unionism
- Education
- Agricultural and food production

So far, phases one and two have been successfully completed. Phase one documented and analyzed the contributions of Ruth Nita Barrow to regional and international development. CGDS published the book, *Stronger, Surer, Bolder: Ruth Nita Barrow — Social Change and International Development*, edited by Eudine Barriteau and Alan Cogley and published by the University of the West Indies Press in 2001.

Phase two, which began in December of 2001, was devoted to “Women, Power and Politics”. During this phase, the contributions made by Dame Eugenia Charles⁴ to

³ Lectures Nos. 5, 6, 8, 9 and 13 have been published in the Centre's Working Paper Series, as Working Papers No. 3, 7, 12, 13, and 14.

⁴ Dame Eugenia Charles, sadly, died on September 6, 2005, before the book was published.

Dominica and to the Commonwealth Caribbean were documented and analyzed. CGDS published the book, *Enjoying Power: Eugenia Charles and Political Leadership in the Commonwealth Caribbean*, edited by Eudine Barriteau, and Alan Cobley, and published by the University of the West Indies Press in 2006.

Madame Justice Desiree Bernard of the Caribbean Court of Justice has been selected and agrees to be the subject of phase three of the Caribbean Women Catalysts for Change Project.

Establishing of The Dame Nita Barrow Women in Development Specialist Collection

After the CWCC project had begun, the other goal of the project was to implement the establishment of the specialist collection with one of its main objectives being as follows:

To have the Cave Hill Campus as a repository for the papers and documents of outstanding Caribbean Women so that wherever researchers are in the world, if they want to study the lives of these women, they would have to come here (Barriteau September 9, 2002).⁵

What follows are the nine objectives that the CGDS, Cave Hill unit, set out to achieve.

- To document and analyze the national, regional and international contributions of outstanding Caribbean women who have acted as catalysts for social and economic change in the Caribbean
- To conserve, preserve and make available for future generations the papers of outstanding Caribbean women, beginning with the documents of Dame Nita Barrow
- To ensure the preservation of the private, public and documentary records of outstanding Caribbean women as a means of contributing to the preservation of the documentary heritage of Caribbean peoples
- To provide enduring access to these records for regional and international scholars and people
- To contribute to the body of material available for teaching in the areas of Gender and Development Studies, Management Studies and other related disciplines
- To strengthen, enhance and build the institutional capacity of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies to undertake ongoing research on or about women, to benefit all women in particular and Caribbean society in general
- To continue to make an impact on teaching, policy formulation, research and outreach in the region

⁵ Overview by Dr. Eudine Barriteau on the Official Handing over of the Nita Barrow Papers. Cave Hill campus, Barbados, September 19, 2002:2.

- To continue to develop the Cave Hill library as a regional repository for important papers of outstanding Caribbean women
- To continue to develop the University of the West Indies as the primary centre of excellence for research on outstanding Caribbean women.

The process

In January 1996, CGDS, at Cave Hill, submitted to the Academic Board a number of proposals to honour the memory and public life of Dame Nita Barrow. One of these proposals was that the University should establish a Dame Nita Barrow Women in the Caribbean Collection. The Academic Board accepted the proposals.⁶

The handing over

Based on correspondence reviewed, the official handing over of the Dame Nita Papers took place on September 19, 2002 at 11 a.m. on the Cave Hill campus. It is of significance that the culmination of this part of the process happened on the tenth anniversary of the Centre. On that same date, as part of the official handing over, Dame Eugenia Charles presented to the Principal of the Cave Hill campus, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles,⁷ a Deed of Gift donating her papers to the University.

“Dame Eugenia is honouring a commitment she made in 1997 when she agreed to be the woman whose public contributions we would analyse in Phase II” (Barriteau September 19, 2002:3).

CGDS and Main Library, Cave Hill campus, open collection

From the acceptance by the Academic Board in 1996, to the official handing over of the papers of Dame Nita, and the Gift of Deed by Dame Eugenia Charles in 2002, it took ten years to achieve the goal of having the Cave Hill campus as a repository for the papers and documents of outstanding Caribbean Women. The process was successfully completed on November 15, 2006, with the official opening of the Specialist Collection, the Nita Barrow Collection, by Dr. Jeannine Comma, niece of Dame Nita Barrow. On this same occasion, CGDS, Cave Hill Unit, was renamed The Centre for Gender and Development Studies: Nita Barrow Unit (CGDS: NBU).

The papers of Dame Nita Barrow, Governor General of Barbados, 1990–1995, form the core of the Collection, which includes the papers of Dame Eugenia Charles, Prime Minister of Dominica, 1980–1995.

The collection includes monographs, periodicals and newspapers, minutes of meetings, correspondence, memoranda, conference papers, reports, press releases, interviews, programs, journal articles, memorabilia, newspaper and other clippings, speeches, photographs, video and sound tapes.

⁶ Overview by Dr. Eudine Barriteau on the Official Handing over of the Nita Barrow Papers. Cave Hill Campus, Barbados, September 19, 2002:2.

⁷ He received an honorary knighthood in 2007.

A searchable database of the items in the collection is available in the Nita Barrow Reading Room. Documents are made available only to fulfill specific research needs. The Collection also includes some documents to which access is restricted.

Users

The collection is open to local, regional, national, and international researchers, historians, and students interested in early post-Independence Commonwealth Caribbean political history and American foreign policy in the region around the time of the Grenada invasion.

To conclude, I will join the librarian, Mrs. Jenipher Carnegie, responsible at the time for the managing of the collection in saying “This is really a tremendous resource” (Barbados Advocate 2005, 15).⁸

⁸ *The Barbados Advocate*. “Two Dames’ papers in special collection”. Wednesday February 2, 2005, 15.

LECTURES AND PRESENTERS LECTURE SERIES

Lecture No. 14. Women Leadership in Our Global Society. Professor Elsa Tamez, Professor Emeritus, Latin American Biblical University, San Jose, Costa Rica. November 14, 2008.

Lecture No. 13. Gender, Generation and Memory: Remembering a Future Caribbean. Dr. Alissa Trotz. November 16, 2007.

Lecture No. 12. Economics, Power and Politics: How to Make Accountability for Human Rights and Gender Equality Part of the Picture. Dr. Yassine Fall. November 17, 2006.

Lecture No. 11. The Promotion and Enforcement of Women's Human Rights Within the Judicial System of the Caribbean. The Honorable Madame Justice Desiree Bernard, O.R., C.C.H. First Female Judge of the Caribbean Court of Justice. November 18, 2005.

Lecture No. 10. A Woman's Place in the 21st Century Movement: Reflections on the Quest for Sovereignty and Unity. Ms Selma James, Author, Activist and Widow of C.L.R. James, November 12, 2004.

Lecture No. 9. Men and Masculinities in the Contemporary Caribbean. Dr Linden Lewis, Professor of Sociology, Bucknell University, Pennsylvania, USA, November 14, 2003.

Lecture No. 8. Women and Islam in Africa in the Twenty first Century. Dr. Fatou Sow, Senior Lecturer, Cheik Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal, November 15, 2002.

Lecture No. 7. Traveling Mercies. Lorna Goodison, Poet, Author and Artist, University of Toronto and Jamaica. November 16, 2001.

Lecture No. 6. The Debate on Gender and Development: An African Feminist Perspective. Dr Patricia McFadden, Senior Program Officer, Gender Division of the South African Institute for Policy Studies, Zimbabwe, November 17, 2000.

Lecture No. 5. Globalization, Women's Poverty and Sustainable Development. Devaki Jain, Founder the International Network, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, DAWN, Bangalore, India. November 12, 1999.

Lecture No. 4. UWI—A Progressive University for Women? Dr Marlene Hamilton, Pro Vice Chancellor for Administration and Special Initiatives, University of the West Indies. December 4, 1998.

Lecture No. 3. Women and Political Leadership in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The Honorable Portia Simpson. Minister of Labor, Social Security and Sport, Government of Jamaica. Scheduled for November 14, 1997. Please note this lecture was canceled one week before the date. The Minister called to say general elections had just been declared and no ministers could travel. It was too late to reschedule. It had already been advertised.

Lecture No. 2. A Vision of Health and Development for the Twenty First Century. Dr. Karen Sealy. Caribbean Regional Coordinator, Pan American Health Organization. November 15, 1996.

Lecture No. 1. The Experiences of the First Female Prime Minister in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Dame Eugenia Charles, Prime Minister of Dominica, 1980–1995. November 3, 1995.



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Retrospect and Reflections—Introducing Gender into the Academy: An Interview with Professor Elsa Leo-Rhynie

June Castello

Abstract

Elsa Leo-Rhynie was appointed Professor of Gender and Development Studies in 1992 and served as Regional Co-ordinator of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS), University of the West Indies (UWI), from that appointment until July 1996 when she became Deputy Principal of the Mona Campus. She later created history at the University of the West Indies in February 2006, when she became the first woman to be appointed Principal of a UWI campus, the Mona campus. On Friday, April 4, 2008, having retired from the institution in September 2007, she looked back, in this interview with June Castello, on the progress the CGDS has made in institutionalising gender.

JC: What is your assessment of the success of the project of institutionalising gender into the academy here at UWI?

ELR: We started in 1982. I use that as the starting point because that was the entry point into the academy, although the Women in the Caribbean Research Project had been located in the academy through the Institute of Social and Economic Studies at UWI, Cave Hill, Barbados. This was viewed as a project of the Institute and not seen as a University programme. It was at the end of that project, and as a result of the research carried on in that project, that it was recognised that this material was so rich, that it was so bountiful. Also, in terms of movements in other parts of the world where Women's Studies was becoming one of the major new thrusts, we recognised that we needed to move towards institutionalisation.

In the twenty-six years since we've been going, I think the results are evident, and I think, worthy of commendation. The introduction of Gender Studies has been very successful. I think the fact is that we started out from a point of nothing and we've come to a situation now where we have programmes at all levels. We have a research agenda, and we also do a certain amount of outreach in terms of policy, as well as implementing policy within the Caribbean. I think that speaks to the success over a relatively short period of time.

JC: Much has been said about the need for critical self-reflection as we bring Gender and Development Studies into the academy and into the public discourse. To what extent do you think that the women in the academy and activists who have been working in this area have employed this method?

ELR: I think critical self-reflection is always difficult. But I think it is essential. I don't think we have really done enough of it and partly, I think, because everybody is so pressed! There are so few resources, so much to be done and the people sort of go about their daily lives just getting the things done and the time when you can come together as a Centre with all people together then is taken up with planning as to what more is to be done and what are the priorities rather than that time for looking back and seeing, well, where we have been and what have we done and how could we have done it better. Even though this analysis should inform the planning going forward, I don't think that we have done it to the extent that we could have but I think that we have done some of it and I think that it is inherent in whatever we plan to do. We may not take a block of time and say, "Let us sit and engage in critical self-reflection" but I think that in planning to go forward we automatically say, "but that has not worked" or "that may not be the best way to go because of our experience there" and so, move forward. So, in a sense it is sort of inter-mixed and blended with whatever we plan to do for the future rather than separated out as a separate activity.

JC: Do you think that the process of institutionalisation has worked against the critical self-reflection?

ELR: You become more complacent about your position within the academy. I am surprised, for instance, to find that there is not that motivation and that eagerness among young academics to tackle things because somehow things have just become taken for granted. When we had to fight, for instance, to just get a course approved and offered...people would do it without pay. That's dead because you have become institutionalised, you are supposed to be part of the mainstream so everything has to be done a certain way and so that stimulus for continuing action has kind of died.

JC: Geertjie Lycklama à Nijeholt, of the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague, is on record as saying that across the world one of the important tasks related to the institutionalisation of Women's Studies in the academy is ensuring that these "studies" remain organically connected to the Women's Movement so that women's needs and interests in the academy are centred in these discourses. How well are we doing here at UWI in that respect?

ELR: When we were establishing the Centre, there was a very strong concern that the activism and the activist role which had been so much a part of the Women and Development Studies Groups would not be lost. The two persons who started this were Joycelin Massiah, who was on the academic side, and Peggy Antrobus, who was on the activist side. So those two areas were strongly and equally represented. I think that once the institutionalisation took place, there was, for some time, a continuation of that interest in activism. But gradually, activism, in the form that we knew it (and I am stressing that, **in the form that we knew it**) changed.

But we have remained activist in another way, which I think is as powerful and as influential as the former type. For instance, the role of the Centre in setting policy through CARICOM, the role of the Centre in working with [the] United Nations, the role of the Centre in working with various government agencies and with governments in terms of how gender can be put on the front burner of their activities. I think that the level at which the activism had taken place has changed but there has been a strong activist agenda within the Centre for Gender and Development Studies. It has not been at the grassroots but it has been at a level where I think it has been making a very positive and strong contribution.

JC: How would you answer the charge that in disconnecting ourselves from grassroots activism, the Centre has, in fact, replaced the power relations of gender with the power relations of socioeconomic class?

ELR: I guess there would be that sort of criticism, but it is a matter of choice, when you have limited resources and when you have to make choices about how those resources are to be used and you do have to think about where the contribution can be greatest. I think that, given the shortage of resources and the expertise that

we have, I don't see us organising a grassroots movement which is going to have the impact that we would need to have in order to make a difference to the same extent as we can do with the expertise we have, for instance leading a gender-mainstreaming project within the government sector or training trainers who can go out and do that grassroots work with others.

So I see us really trying to identify our role within all this and accepting that many of these places are talk shops and paper producers etc. but, at the same time, I don't see how we would with the resources have been able to do, for instance, what Peggy was able to do with WAND, and which the University still supports in a sense saying, well, WAND is the activist unit but we want the Centre to do research, affect policy influence at another level. So, I think that our working with WAND has not been as strong as I had hoped it would have been. I felt there ought to be a complementarity between the two where the research that we do and whatever we teach would link in with what WAND is seeing on the ground and there would be a sort of organic link between the two. The Consultative Committee which used to function and which had a WAND representative on it has changed with institutionalisation, so we no longer have that link which allows us to blend our research with the grassroots practice.

JC: In your paper "Institutionalising Gender Into the Academy", you identified four tasks to have done so that we can achieve inter-disciplinarity. One of them was to deconstruct existing disciplinary structures and boundaries through a thorough critique, both of how they were built up, and the assumed artificiality of separateness. Do you think we at UWI have done that?

ELR: I don't think that we have achieved it and I think it is going to be very, very, difficult. I think to some extent we have tried. I think that many of our research projects have spanned different areas; they have been truly inter-disciplinary. But I think the whole business of the deconstruction has not been done, mainly because we have not had the expertise, the personnel, within the centre, who can undertake that sort of analysis. Looking at science, for one: science is a very difficult area and even in universities where they do have the resources, science is an area which people sort of steer clear of. Because if it is not dealing with health where it is easy to see where the gender issues are defined, science maintains its stance as an objective discipline and [one] cannot see how gender can be mainstreamed or even invoked when speaking about scientific results, findings etc.

Of course, there are some who do the deconstruction and look at different ways in which science has been prejudicial to women, not only to women scientists in terms of recognising their work—and of course you have the celebrated case of Rosamund Franklin and the DNA molecule where the men got the Nobel Prize and her contribution, which was central and really important, was just overlooked. And so the prize was given to her much later when she had already died and when women made a fuss about the fact that she had not been recognised. So I do think

that the deconstruction within this academy has not taken place to the extent that it could have been. I think that we have been very successful in the areas where we do have expertise, such as in Sociology and in Education. So, I think going slowly, we will probably achieve it, eventually. But I don't think we've done badly.

JC: Another task you identified was employing the tools of different disciplines (theories and methodologies) to arrive at a deeper, more textual, meaning of existing phenomena and to explain part dimensions of new concepts. How successful has the CGDS been in this instance?

ELR: Again, I think that we have been partially successful. I certainly have noted that over the years, there is much greater use of qualitative methodology, research methodology which allows for the voices of the "subjects". Quantitative analysis looks at masses of "subjects" in a holistic fashion which brings all their views down to one measure, whereas the qualitative analysis has allowed their voices to be heard. That, I think, has become much more prevalent in terms of the research which has come out of this academy over the past years. We have benefited—I would like to say that we have led that—but I certainly think that the Women in the Caribbean Project was a breakthrough in terms of how the methodologies were used. So, for instance they used film, they used video, they used the words of women to indicate how women's lives were affected and all of this was part of the outcome of the research project. And now, we see much more of that taking place in Education, in Sociology, in Psychology, in every respect although the quantitative remains, very often.

I am now reading about mixed mode methodology, where you use the quantitative and the qualitative together, and the qualitative has taken on different forms. I can't let the Centre take credit for that because I think that it is happening everywhere in the academy. I think there has been a recognition of the importance of the qualitative method and the use of the different media that are now so prevalent in terms of recording research. But I do think that we have not been backward in using that; in fact in many instances we have led the way in terms of the use of these media within the academy.

JC: It is a very topical issue for people to speak about the crisis of men, the marginalisation of men, and the UWI with the 82:18 male:female student enrolment ratio is very much a part of that discussion. In your opinion, has this focus retarded, in any way, the achievement of institutionalisation of gender here at UWI?

ELR: No, I don't think so. I think that the Jamaican situation is a special one. Granted it is pointing up what is also being seen in other parts of the world but maybe it is just being evident here first. But if we are speaking about ourselves as Gender, and Development, then we do have to look at the elements which affect male-female inter-relationships and, certainly, the condition of men in our society is a

major contributor to the male-female relationships. What I feel, though, is that when women realised that their situation was one which was untenable because of the asymmetries in the society, women got up and they pulled together, they worked together, they built their research, they put together the data and they used it now to create a case for themselves. What I find [is that] the men are expecting the women to do it for the men as well. And I feel that, yes, women do have a vested interest in ensuring that men reach their maximum potential and that we do make sure that they do not fall by the wayside. I mean, all of society will benefit from having men who are productive and creative and contributing to the national economy and also contributing, naturally, to family life etc. But I don't know why men seem to feel that it is women's role to take the lead in doing this for men when they have already done it for the women.

When I have raised this with men they say, "But you did it so successfully for the women so why not take on the men as well!" And it goes back to the whole business of some of our research, to the socialisation, because boys are socialised mainly by men and even if their upbringing is led by a woman, they look to men for the roles which they are going to assume. When they see the sort of roles that are out there now, and there is no male who is counteracting this or giving them another view, or showing them another path, then this is the path they are to use. And women's voices are not heard by young men after they reach a certain age and we have to know that... So I think that it is very important for both men and women to be involved in this. But I do see the male question as being part of our agenda.

JC: There is a popular understanding of "gender" as a term that, when used, must of necessity, include both men and women. What is your view on the "me, too"-ism in understandings about gender, this notion of "if women, therefore men"?

ELR: Yes, I guess that is the concern. But if it is gender, where are the men in gender who are going to assist in doing this. I mean, if it is gender, then we need to have men joining us. There are very few men and the very few men who work in this area have been with us over many, many years. Then there are very few new men; we can't find any new men who will come in and do this sort of work and analysis. So, we started out as Women and Development Studies and at the time, when we were setting up the Centre, there was a strong controversy about whether it should be Gender and Development Studies or Women and Development Studies because our focus had been women. The decision to go with Gender was brought about by the fact that we thought that it would be difficult to focus only on women. So we went with gender and I suppose that has given those who are pressing now, a foothold to say you are gender, so, you know, you must deal with this.

I do see it is as part of the agenda but I also see it as being thrust upon us by a patriarchal society that wants to maintain the status quo where men are concerned and so they expect us to fix it so that men retain their privilege. They are not

concerned with an equitable society where men and women are treated in similar fashion and have similar access and control etc. They want us to fix things the way they were that men remain in control. Patriarchy must survive.

JC: What are your views on mainstreaming gender in the academy?

ELR: Well, at the moment it is very difficult to even contemplate what it could mean. Right now we have eighty percent of our entry being female, twenty percent being male. There is a strong movement to have a sort of affirmative action type thing to increase the number of men. It is back again and what it is likely to mean is that some of that eighty percent of girls who are qualified to come in here are going to be told “you cannot come” and boys who are not achieving at the same level of those girls are going to come.

The whole business [of] mainstreaming gender is something which you have to consider in terms of what type of gender theory are we using in this mainstreaming. If we are using liberal, then we have to go along with it because we are saying that the society has fifty per cent men, we have to give them equal opportunity, etc., etc. Can we really agree to that? I certainly can't because I see that whoever is achieving, whether it be male or female, has to come in. Nobody was concerned about making equal numbers for girls when the men were eighty per cent of the student body here. But suddenly we are to make way for boys and it is always the women who must make way for the men. So, the whole business of mainstreaming is something which is very difficult especially in a situation where we have a charter which says that people are not to be discriminated against in terms of sex, race, etc. A number of persons looked at the management of the University recently and said that, oh, UWI is doing well. We have one campus Principal who is female. We have how many Pro-Vice Chancellors who are female? One of the posts that were occupied by a man has been filled by a woman and she is the only person now, along with the University Librarian, in the Executive Management of the University¹.

But then, you say, people were interviewed for these posts. The persons who filled the criteria best were the persons chosen. If they happen to be male, they happen to be male; if they happen to be female, they happen to be female. So, in terms of mainstreaming, it is a difficult thing because you are not sure how best to do it without disadvantaging, or seeming to discriminate against one or the other.

JC: What kind of position and advocacy should the Centre produce in this matter of proposed affirmative action in recruitment of males by the University.

¹ At the time of writing and subsequent to this interview, there have been two women added to the Executive Management team: Professor Rhoda Reddock, Deputy Principal, St. Augustine campus, and Professor V. Eudine Barribeau, Deputy Principal, Cave Hill campus. There are now five women on this team. It is to be noted, also, that the University Librarian, while being a part of the Vice Chancellery, is not a member of the Executive Management Team.

ELR: Quite frankly, I think we just go back to the charter. Once the charter says there shall be no discrimination, then you are talking about a meritocratic system and if the women are the ones with the merit, and if we have one hundred percent women qualified above any of the men who are seeking to come in here, then we have one hundred per cent women.

JC: But how do you think the argument about a meritocratic system would stand up to critics who say that UWI is supposed to be more accessible to the community it serves?

ELR: If we are talking about being more accessible, and we also have a system of selection where our basis for selection rests on criteria of achievement prior to entry to the University, then we have to rely on those criteria. If we are going to change, then we have to change the charter, and we have to change the criteria and we have to have agreement within the University Council that this is the change that we want. And it is going to have to be stated to say that “in each year we recognise that there are persons who have conditions which militate against their achievement and, therefore, ten percent of all entrants are going to be students who have achieved below our matriculation but who come from disadvantaged situations etc.” It would have to be something which is clearly defined and we would have to say we agree and we do not see this as discrimination.

I have heard someone say the other day—it is something which I have known for a long time—but I heard someone say the other day which is in keeping somehow, that a C+ from a child doing CAPE from the ghetto is equivalent to an A from a child doing CAPE in a privileged home where they have Internet access and everything laid on. A sociologist, some years ago, had said that universities and employers ought to use a ladder model of assessing entrants rather than a race model, because the ladder model allows you to see people having starting points on different rungs. And therefore, for someone who has no stresses of study, who has everything laid on, who comes to school in a car, who parks and has dinner ready for them when they go home etc. is starting from a rung which is, maybe, four rungs from the finish line. Whereas the one who has to go through gunfire, has to study by candlelight, has to scrounge around for something to eat, is starting out at the bottom of the ladder. So for that person to get to the finish line is a much greater achievement, is much greater than the person who only has the three rungs.

So, I see problems with the whole business about gender mainstreaming because it tends to have the liberal feminist guidance in terms of let us have equal numbers or let us have special provisions for the group that is seen at the moment as needing that special provision. But when we look at our graduates, yes, predominantly female, when we look at our work world [it is] predominantly male. Unemployment is higher among women than men and even among the qualified women. And when those men and women get out into the work world

the men are snapped up like that, whereas the women who very often have higher class of degrees, better degrees, are still searching for work. And when they are hired, they are hired at lower levels than the men who come out with those degrees.

So, I think we need to look at everything in terms of how we do it and we also need to look at what are the young men who are not coming to university doing because a lot of them are seeing university as something they do later if they wish. But they want to get into business, they want to start their own thing, they want to earn money quickly and they are going into other areas, some of them illegal but that's what the society is producing.

JC: Is it important for the people who are employed by the CGDS to be feminists?

ELR: Yes. The thing is, that word has become a bad word, has become totally misunderstood. When I say "yes", by "feminist" I mean someone who understands that within the society there are different power relationships between men and women and that by labelling myself a feminist, I am seeking to overcome that. Now I can't see any reason why this should be offensive to anyone and I think it should apply to men as well as women. But it has been given a bad name by people who see feminists as a kind of crazy group, insane fringe group, shouting and screaming and thirty years later still burning bras and that sort of thing. So you will hear people saying—I have heard it several times—I am not a feminist but I do believe that men and women should have equal rights within the society. And I am saying, what on earth are they saying? So I think that there needs to be clarity in terms of what is a feminist so that people understand and get rid of the old baggage that goes with the term.

Yes, I think anyone who works in the Centre for Gender and Development Studies ought to be someone who not only recognises the differences and the prejudices and the discrimination and the whole issue about patriarchy in society, but is also willing to work through research, through teaching, through outreach to change that.

JC: Do you think that CGDS staff come under greater scrutiny for our personal politics than do staff in other departments?

ELR: Yes. I remember there was an issue of young women who were being molested on the campus and one of the first things was "Well, where is the Centre for Gender and Development Studies in all this? They should be the ones doing this and doing that", when it hadn't even been brought to the attention of the Centre. But they assume that anything that deals with women and abuse ought to come—and I am not saying that it ought not to come—but the point is there is that sort of immediate reaction as if this is even more essential for the Centre for Gender and Development Studies. When we have problems with HIV, I suppose, they call on the medics so I suppose this is how we do our area of competence.

JC: How important would you say it is for the CGDS staff to conduct a full analysis of power among themselves as they seek to confront complex and unequal relationships of power in their work?

ELR: I think it is important, very important. I don't like to use myself as an example, but a number of people have said to me during the period when I was Principal of the campus: "But you have power; why don't you use your power?"...And somehow I felt uncomfortable about the use of power as I had seen it used by men in the past. It was not something which I felt was going to, in any way, enhance equity, bring about meaningful change, and so I resisted all those blandishments that people were talking about: "use your power, use your power". I think that women, and I don't like to speak for all women but I know that I certainly saw power in a totally different way. I think that to empower others is to make sure that things do get done. So, I could never, for instance, say, "Well, I have said so and therefore it is going to be so!" I would have to make sure that others feel, well, this is something which is going to be desirable; can we do it? Is it something that will benefit everybody? Okay, let's go, let's do it.

So I see power as something which allows you to share and bring others to a point where a particular action or a particular direction is seen as being a desirable way. I certainly do not see power as something which you wield like a heavy hammer and let it go. But for many persons, that's how power is to be used and they equate power with position and therefore, if you have the position, you now have the power to use that hammer and use it very heavily if necessary, not even lightly. So I think power is an issue which really ought to be considered seriously in the Centre and discussed in terms of the whole issue of feminism and what is feminism, in terms of the whole business of inter-relationships, male-female relationships, patriarchy and all the sort of framework issues of feminist scholarship which we have to deal with.

JC: Can you share with us your wish list for CGDS for the next ten years?

ELR: I am sorry to think first of all of staff and infrastructure. But basically, that's where it is. I think there is so much to be done, and therefore, I wish that we could have an allocation to have a centre building with a staff and with the ability to offer our degrees to a larger number of students and to really expand the scope of our scholarship into other areas. That's where my head would immediately go.



The University of
the West Indies
Centre for Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

CLOTIL WALCOTT 1925–2007 — A TRIBUTE

By Rhoda Reddock

Abstract

In our lifetimes we sometimes have the privilege to live and walk with people of great vision and genius. Sometimes we recognize that greatness, sometimes we don't and even when we do, it often takes their passing for us to realize the fullness of their contribution. Clotil Walcott was one such person. Even though she was recognized many times over during her lifetime — how much more do we recognize her greatness now that she is no longer here with us. Clotil was an (extra) ordinary, working-class woman who attempted to bring before the public, the hardships and experiences of working women, both in their paid work and in their unwaged work which she knew first hand; she engaged in a continuous struggle to improve their working and living conditions. Clotil described herself as a grassroots woman and became in many ways the voice of the voiceless, never waiting for an invitation to attend an event or meeting related to workers' or women's rights.

Introduction

Clotil Walcott was born on the 7th September 1925 in Wellington Street, St. Joseph. She lived there with her parents for six years until the family moved to Arima in search of employment. She first attended St. Joseph Roman Catholic School, then the Arima Roman Catholic School. In addition to the normal school curriculum, as was customary in those days, Clotil and a few of the other students were given extra lessons after school by the nun, in French and Latin. While at school, like most other youngsters she was very interested in sport — her favourites being cricket, rounders and athletics. At this time too she developed an interest in drawing and painting.

Her first work experience was in a dry goods store. However, unsatisfied with this type of employment, she left and began work at the Central Experimental Station at Centeno. A few years later she was among a group of workers at the Station who were made redundant. In February 1964, she began employment at the Cannings Poultry Processing Plant in Arima. This was a branch of the larger Cannings Group of Companies,¹ which included among its many subsidiaries, a chain of supermarkets, stationery stores, meat wholesalers, a soft drink and ice cream factory and many other businesses. According to Clotil, it was her bitter experiences with both the union and the employer while working with this company for fifteen years that helped to develop her interest in the oppression and exploitation of working women.

In 1965, Clotil Walcott began her activities in the Labour Movement by joining the Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers (U.C.I.W.). This union was eventually replaced as the representative for the Cannings workers and in 1967 she joined the National Union of Government and Federated Workers (N.U.G.F.W.). In her own words ...

I became particularly concern[ed] about the problems of the working women being oppressed and exploited; to do this effectively I discovered I had also to be conversant with the problems of male workers.

In order to increase her knowledge of the subject, she took an overseas correspondence course in Industrial Relations, gaining certificates in Trade Union Law, Shop Steward Duties, Industrial Negotiations, Industrial Law and Collective Bargaining. On March 13, 1974, she was elected shop steward by the union members in her department but was never allowed to fully serve these workers. During her tenure in office, she became painfully aware of the role of the union at the time which, according to her, supported the company against the workers. This they did by not standing by the terms of the Industrial

¹ This is also part of the larger Neal and Massy Group of Companies.

Agreement. By September 10, 1974, she was, in her own words, “arbitrarily ejected” from the post. This information was conveyed to her in a letter from the Union executive dated October 3, 1974.

Although she had the support of the majority of the workers, an announcement was made stating that both the Divisional Manager of the Company *and* the President General of the Union did not want her to represent the workers. Despite the lack of a formal position, Clotil continued her work of supporting the workers. In the meantime, the company and the Union continued their campaign against her. In the factory, she was subjected to much discrimination and victimization, but her understanding of trade union law was a factor contributing to her continuing employment.

Despite all this, Clotil continued fighting, sending letters to the Union on behalf of workers, writing to the newspapers (which seldom published the letters) and writing to the Minister of Labour. Her activities in formal trade union work then shifted to other unions such as the Bank and General Workers Union (BGWU) and the Union of Ship Builders and Ship-Repairers (USSR).

Clotil had begun to participate actively in politics from about 1966. Initially this comprised mainly activities in electoral campaigns in support of people seeking political office. During the period 1969–1972, she became a member of NJAC — The National Joint Action Committee and participated in the Black Power and Black consciousness movement which swept the country, with its aims of “Black identity, Cultural, Social and Economic Improvement”. During the state of emergency she would take her daughter Ida, then 16 years of age, to visit the political detainees, supporting them by providing food, or when necessary, a hiding place. This no doubt contributed to Ida’s own continued commitment to the work her mother started. Commenting on this experience Clotil later observed, “yet we have not been able to come together sufficiently, to really examine our collective experience as black people in a struggle ...”

In 1974, Clotil along with her close friend and comrade Brother James Lynch, Salisha Ali and others established The National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) as a section of the Union of Ship Builders, Ship Repairers and Allied Workers Union (USSR). The bulletin announcing its formation stated, “Calling all persons serving in the capacity of cooks, kitchen helpers, maids, butlers, seamstresses, laundresses, barmen, babysitters, chauffeurs, messengers, yardmen and household assistants” — heralding the union’s concern with low-income workers, more generally, in addition to domestic workers, broadly defined.

During the election campaign of 1976, she supported the Democratic Action Congress (D.A.C.), a centre party, because in her own words:

I felt it my duty to find a platform through which I could influence a programme and promote the women's role in our society... I had the opportunity of encouraging one of the leading platform speakers Mrs. Jennifer Johnson of the D.A.C. to give prominence to both the international and local aspect of women's progressive programme.

Later she would shift her allegiance, as many trade unionists would, to the United Labour Front. In addition, she was also a member of the Trinidad and Tobago Peace Council, a branch of the World Peace Council, under the leadership of Dr. James Millette and sold copies of the newspaper *Moko* through the streets of Port of Spain, often using money from her own pocket to pay for papers that were not sold.

Driven by the failure to get her views aired in the press, Clotil did her own publishing. She taught herself to type with two fingers, and bought a typewriter. Using this she prepared stencils that were printed on Gestetner machines by friends and associates. On completion, these pamphlets were sold by Clotil herself at fifty cents each, around the town, at political meetings and at the parliament building. I remember seeing Clotil in Parliament with a pile of papers on her arm selling to all who were willing to purchase. This was the start of my admiration for her strength, courage and perseverance, qualities I wished I had more of. Four of these early publications dealt with her struggle at the Cannings Poultry Processing Plant and were entitled:-

1. The Exploitation of Working-Class Women -v- Cannings Ltd. Guilty? Part I.
2. A Woman's Fight — An example of Exploitation of The Working-Class Woman. Part II.
3. Women's Aim Now is to end Exploitation. Part III.

On May Day 1979, at a Trade Union Rally, she delivered a paper entitled:-

4. Working-Class Woman Speaks Out.

These four essays were published in a booklet entitled *Fight Back Says a Woman*, by the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, in the 1980s.

In 1980, Clotil was invited to attend an international conference on Women's Struggles and Research at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague in The Netherlands. That was an important turning point in her development. It was at this meeting that Clotil met Selma James and Wilmette Brown of the International Wages for Housework Campaign. Immediately the connection between the rights of domestic workers and the struggle for the recognition of women's unwaged domestic labour became clear and from henceforth a relationship would develop which would continue for close to thirty years. It was clear that both these movements were based on something which was so important, so obvious to us now but yet so under-recognised — the way in which the accepted, unwaged domestic labour of women in the home (namely housework and child-care) was taken for granted, not perceived as important, not valued and therefore paid very little or not at all.

This marked the beginning of a mutually beneficial relationship as well as Clotil's new career in international mobilisation and diplomacy. She would speak at conferences in Vienna, Austria; Turin, Italy; Nairobi Kenya; Beijing China; London in the United Kingdom as well as Kingston, Jamaica, to name a few. NUDE became the local representative of the International Wages for Housework Campaign

In 1982, NUDE registered as a union in its own right under the Trades Unions Ordinance, although to this day household assistants are not recognized as workers. Over its more than 25 years of existence, NUDE would continue the struggle for recognition of household workers as workers as well as a number of other struggles with which it was more successful. Based on the struggles of Clotil, NUDE and later her daughter Ida Le Blanc, the following developments were achieved:

1. The passing of the Minimum Wages and Terms and Conditions of Service for Household Assistants Order under the Minimum Wages Act Chapter 88:04:18–17, November 1982. This included minimum wages, a 44-hour work week; overtime rates for public holidays, maternity leave, vacation leave etc.
2. The passing of the Unremunerated Work Act, 1995 which allows for the counting of unwaged work in national statistics, the result of — among other things — numerous letters written by Clotil to the Prime Minister, The Minister of Labour, the Minister with responsibility for Women's Affairs and every other possible government ministry or department, culminating in the successful piloting of an Independent Member's Bill in Parliament by then Senator Diana Mahabir Wyatt. This made Trinidad and Tobago one of the first countries in the world to pass such legislation and the Trinidad and Tobago language was used as the model for the Beijing Declaration on Women.

As an activist on women's and labour issues Clotil did not need to be invited to attend a meeting or public event. As long as she felt it was relevant to her cause she would be there. Sometimes organisations would deliberately not invite her as they would be afraid of her public chastisement; if even she was officially on the programme, it was pointless to try to stop Clotil from speaking beyond the allotted time.

But Clotil was also a mother; a single mother of five children — three girls and two boys — Pearl, Ida and Merle, and Ben and Andrew. Clotil approached her work of mothering with the same seriousness and commitment as her politics or maybe it was the other way around. For many argue that it is the fire of mother's love that often inspires many strong and dedicated women activists to their self-sacrificing work. She would defend her children and grandchildren to the death as many would soon learn and, women's activist aside, woe betide any woman who mistreated or took advantage of her beloved son Ben. In all her doings, Clotil kept her children close to her and they loved and admired her. Never did they feel neglected by her as they came to understand and even participate in her struggle. In their childhood, they remember picking tonca beans on the Torrecilla Estate and filling crocus bags from as early as 4 a.m. After this they would bathe in the

river then go off to school — that is all of them except Pearl whom her mother would indulgently allow to continue bathing in the river.

Although poor and working-class, Clotil struggled with pride to keep her children well-fed, disciplined and happy. After Church and/or Sunday School on Sundays she would inspect the one good “Sunday best” to ensure that it was in good condition to be worn again; she would say “put my dress there” after checking for tears and any soiling. After this they would enjoy her Sunday red beans and other delights. When she relaxed as she did with family and friends it would be with her daily coffee, salt fish and provision with “plenty olive oil”.

Clotil was able to combine her political and trade union work with effective parenting by virtue of her location in the nurturing community of Mt. Pleasant Road, Arima. Therefore her home, which she strived always to keep clean and tidy — especially her well organized office at the back — would become an Open House for all who cared to enter; a home where her children and grandchildren preferred never to leave, and where she would preside as matriarch over the different generations. Neighbours would observe, coming and going over the years, important international visitors, representatives of the ILO such as Constance Thomas, the International Wages Housework campaigner Selma James and officials of other United Nations Bodies, trade union colleagues like Michael Als and Vincent Cabrera, women’s movement activists such as Claris Manswell, Gaietry Pargass, Rowena Kalloo, and international scholars and researchers like Janet Bauer and Marina Karides.

We need to thank the community of Mt. Pleasant Road (Wattley Circular) for providing this nurturing space to Clotil and her family to live, work and grow. We need also to thank Clotil’s family for allowing us to share so much of her time, vision, energy and intellect which allowed her to enrich all our lives in Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and indeed the world.

What can we say of such a woman? I for one can go on and on but we would never have said enough. How can we honour her memory which has inspired so many of us? How can we keep her name alive for future generations to know and to revere? This is a conversation we still need to have. Clotil received many awards in recognition of her contributions. These include the following:

1. 9th June, 1984 - Bank and General Workers Union Grand Certificate of Honour for service and dedication to the trade union movement;
2. 1985 - The Star Citizen Award — Peoples’ Popular Movement;
3. 1991 - Servant and Hero of Labour Award — Council of Progressive Trade Unions (CPTU);
4. 1991 - Network of NGO’s for the Advancement of Women for her Outstanding Contribution to the Women’s Movement;

5. 8th March 1998 - Guardian Women of Trinidad and Tobago Award — for her sterling contributions to the social life of Trinidad and Tobago;
6. 1995 - The Partners of The Americas — in recognition of her 30 years of dedicated service which achieved recognition of the value of women's work;
7. 31st August 1998 - The Humming Bird Medal (silver) — for loyal and devoted service to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in the sphere of Trade Unionism;
8. 24th January 1999 - Woman of the Year — Women Working for Social Progress;
9. 2000 - Award from the Mayor, members of Council and the Burgesses of Arima for Community Service in Recognition of her Contribution towards the Development of Arima;
10. 8th March 2003 - Network of NGO's for the Advancement of Women — International Women's Day 2003, in recognition of her as a Pioneering Woman;
11. 8th March 2006 - Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, in recognition of her contribution to the creation of legislation for the counting of unwaged work.

We can possibly think of many other ways to keep her memory alive but I think that what she would want more than anything else in the world would be the revision of the Industrial Relations Act to recognize household assistants as workers in Trinidad and Tobago — THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES.

Rhoda Reddock
St. Augustine
November 20, 2007.



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>

VIDEO ESSAY

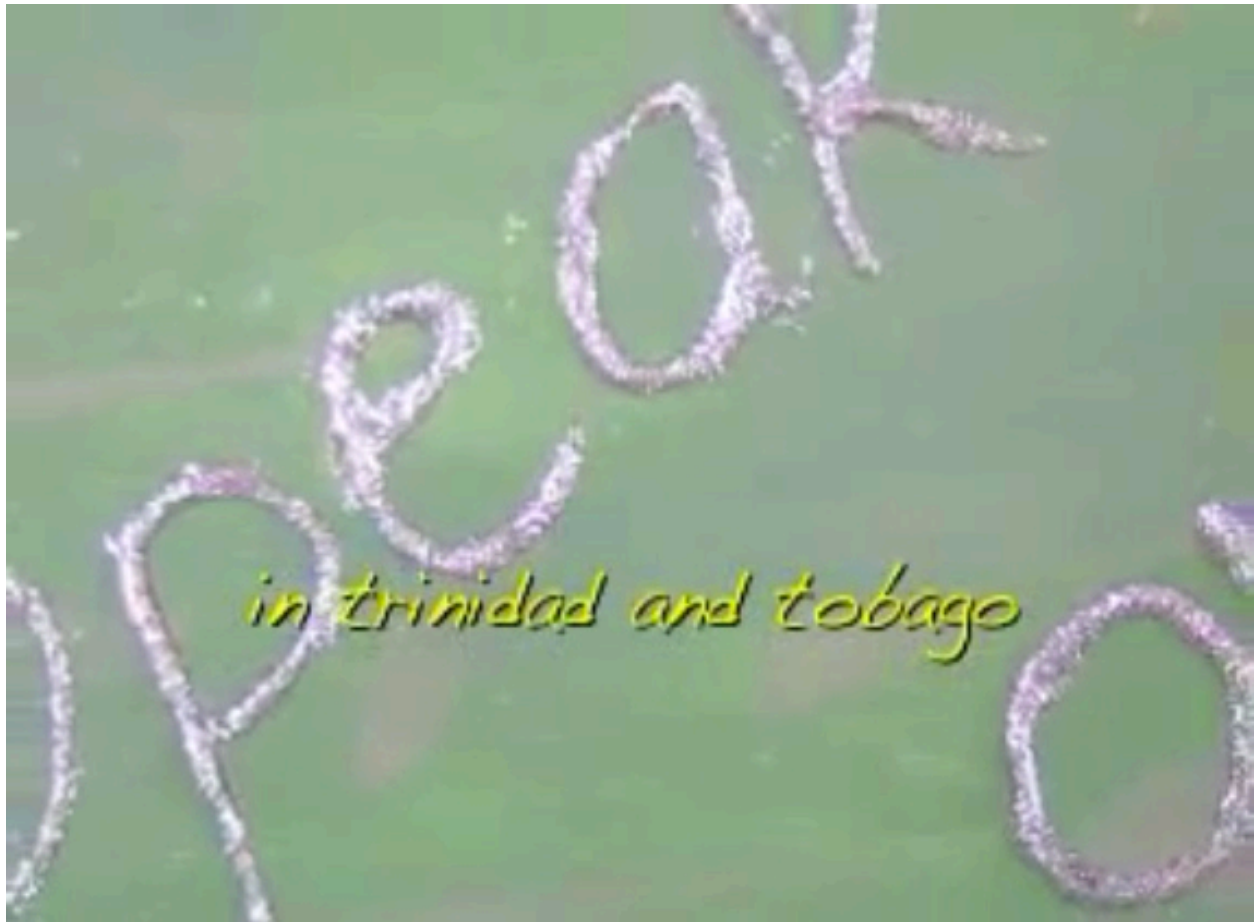


Unease

Jamie Lee Loy

<https://youtu.be/irpW2SgqS14>

VIDEO ESSAY



Speak Out!: Feminist Activism from Behind the Scenes

Gabrielle Hosein

<https://youtu.be/5WXPtu5--d0>



The University of
the West Indies
Centre for Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 2 – 2008

Speak Out!: Feminist Activism from Behind the Scenesⁱ

Gabrielle Jamela Hosein

Abstract

The nine-minute video, *Speak Out!*, uses photos, textⁱⁱ, interviews and musicⁱⁱⁱ to document feminist activism undertaken by students in Trinidad and Tobago in 2006. It highlights the centrality given to consciousness-raising, telling women's stories, women's issues and feminist politics in a first year Introduction to Women's Studies course at the University of the West Indies. The "popular actions" documented in the video were undertaken as an assignment in the course. Overall, the course aimed to teach students about the personal as political, the connection between Women's Studies and women's movements, and the contribution feminist activism can make to knowledge and to gender justice (Vassell 2004).

Introduction

Since being completed in 2007, the video has been shown to later cohorts of students in the course, and in political education workshops among (mostly male) unionists, (mostly female) feminist activists and academics, and female and male youth activists in Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica. It has been used to facilitate discussions about the future of feminism, the status of women, men and masculinities, and movement-building in the Caribbean. In the following pages, I outline some reactions to the video, issues and questions that emerge, and the ways it can be used for facilitating workshops or classes on gender and activism, particularly among young women and men.

Through a looking glass

For some, the video has been inspiring because it shows that ordinary young women and men can use simple and creative activities to engage discourses about violence and sexuality, to explore issues of gender, to bring to the forefront women's perspectives and to publicise issues that people do not normally consider political. Students doing an action on reproductive rights, for example, dressed as traditional Trinidad Carnival "baby-doll"^{iv} characters in wigs and housedresses to show some of the problems faced by women unable to afford a baby and seeking an abortion. Others drew images of women in chalk and asked students to write their interpretation of their circumstances and feelings next to the drawings.

In the classroom, I have used the video mainly as a visual document to convey the powerful and ubiquitous ways that feminist activism can capture the university landscape as well as to highlight the tensions and challenges of different issues and strategies, such as those related to the naming of women's bodies and reproductive rights. The images move quickly, in multilayers and from every direction, and are all drawn from materials in students' actions. They present ideas for popular theatre, posters and themes that female and male gender conscious activists^v can take up, replicate or refine wherever they are.

As a facilitation tool, the video can be used to start discussions about the issues emphasised by the students — their prevalence, manifestations, causes and solutions — both in Trinidad and Tobago, and globally. Are these issues common, yet experienced differently, across varied contexts? Why? What forms should activism and advocacy take? What can be achieved using different strategies and what skills are needed? The video can also be used to stimulate discussion about other issues, other ideas for poster campaigns, workshops or popular theatre, and other spaces where both short, symbolic actions and longer engagements can and need to take place.

More fundamentally, the video highlights the connections the course makes between Women's Studies, feminisms and women's movements, and the definitions of feminism that students then articulate for themselves. It also invites reflection on the role of men. Should Women's Studies seek to expand feminist consciousness and action? What is its relationship to the wider women's movement? Why emphasise a space for focusing on

women's lives and hearing especially from women? In positing a message of solidarity amongst women, because far more still needs to be gained globally, the video also opens up reflection on the differences among women, and the stereotypes and structural relations that create distance, divisions and distrust. How can women examine and challenge the power of negative stereotypes of women, and fearlessly claim and empower more meaningful definitions? On what bases can women actually unite against patriarchy?

These key foci raise additional questions. What does it mean to be feminist? Can men be feminist? Caribbean feminism always benefited from the solidarity and contributions of men, and both young women and men need to continue to cooperate to change unequal gender relations. In workshops, I have used the video to interrogate the idea that because some individual women have done well in the public sphere, this therefore means that all women have "won". If women and girls are succeeding in educational and occupational spheres, what then explains continuing sexual violence against women — and the continuing threat of sexual violence that all women and girls learn to fear? What do students' choices of issues suggest about the relationship between public and private spheres, the intersections of capitalism and patriarchy, and the notions of womanhood and manhood that we continue to negotiate in popular culture, intimate relations, public health care, community policing and workplaces? Therefore, at another level, the video often aroused dialogue about the challenges of creating greater awareness about women's lives among men, and the contributions their solidarity can make to politicising women's experiences and interests.

Can women speak for 'Man'?

In popular consciousness, gender refers to both women and men. However, the fact that men are equally gendered doesn't negate the reality of unequal power relations between women and men (Barriteau 2003). One expression of such power is the way that the "Man Question" frequently drove reaction to the video, just as it underscores many reactions to feminism.

Some critics thought that men were not equitably represented and, for this reason, saw the video as excluding men, and women who reject a Second Wave version of woman-centred feminism, from the target audience. On this basis, both women and men sometimes challenged the video's legitimacy and relevance. Without always intending to, their reactions reinforced the authority of male-centred perspectives and masculinist power relations at individual, systemic and ideological levels.

First, and most commonly commented upon, is that there are no male voices in the video. There are photos of the two men (of ninety-two students) who were in the class, and photos of many others who attended the popular actions, signed petitions and participated in activities. In the video, a handful of the ninety women therefore speak for all the students, including the men. Aside from students in the course, there was only one other student whose perspective is heard. She is a female and I included her because she expressed how surprisingly eloquent and convincing the "cuntspeak" (Caputi 1996) action was with ordinary students.

One of the two male students in the class was involved in a popular action against rape and the other against armed aggression, and both did well overall in the course. I had interviewed both of them, but it was difficult to edit one of the interviews and the other, with one of the men who was quite soft spoken, had terrible sound quality. Both young men gave similar responses to those of the women who ultimately appear. However, for aesthetic reasons, neither interview could really be used. Nonetheless, in addition, there were political considerations as well.

Throughout the semester, when I told people about the large size of the class, often the first question both women and men would immediately ask was how many students in the class were men. This happened repeatedly as if the precedent-setting ninety female students simply didn't exist. Discussion would then focus on why I thought that more men were not enrolled in the class, and how I should make extra efforts to get more men and to make the syllabus more relevant to and about them. By the end of the semester, I was very frustrated by continual attempts to insist that greater androcentrism would make the course appear more legitimate, more relevant to everyone in the society, less "discriminatory" and of higher status.

By 2006, two-thirds of the university student population, especially in humanities and social sciences, were females. This alone made it more likely that the class would be predominantly female. Men were also less likely to enrol in large numbers in a class titled, "Introduction to Women's Studies", either in response to stereotypes about feminism, disinterest in studying women or the assumption that information about women is really for women and not relevant to all society and to men. Many men also fear being the only male in a class of women and getting talk about it by their peers. If young women enrolled in the class often had to deal with comments about becoming a "man-hater", "lesbian" or taking a class in "man-bashing", few men would have been prepared to deal with that as well. Heterosexual men would be especially concerned about appearing feminised because of their choice of course.

So often, we accept it when men speak on behalf of everyone including women, accept that men's perspectives and experiences can represent that of the society as a whole, and are comfortable with the hidden elision between men representing both the species Man and the group men at the same time (Spender 1990). When women speak, can't it be for us all as well? Could not a woman also stand for Man the species when speaking from her own perspective and experience? Can only men's views be considered universal? Rather than reducing them to their sex, I felt that the women in the video could speak for the community of students, both women and men, just as men often and with total legitimacy often speak for the communities of which they are a part despite their specific gendered experience and bias.

Nonetheless, the video highlights twenty-first century dilemmas for documenting feminist activism in academia. It is true that it could appeal to a wider audience and especially to men if other males could speak to the ways that "feminism is for everybody". Yet, this idea exposes the premise that unless men, their perspective or the

male gaze of women is represented, men both would and should have no reason to be interested. It is also true that it would have been worthwhile to hear from at least one of these two special men who chose to take the course. They could shed light on different ways of doing masculinity and, from their standpoint, the way that they defined the relationship between masculinity and Women's Studies. They could even discuss if they were more likely to take a course on "gender" rather than "women" and how their expectations would have differed. Yet, their absence from the video doesn't necessarily mean it represents an outdated feminism, nor one where only women's voices count.

In many ways, these criticisms assumed that men and especially young men would react in clichéd ways to the video. One older woman even called up a young man she knew so that he would come over and immediately verify the video's limitation and bias. Against her expectations, the young man liked the video, liked the idea of getting students involved in campus life, and didn't feel excluded by its message. Some young men's gender politics may in fact have moved beyond where many women and men stereotypically place them. Ironically, the young man was more concerned that a single early shot of a seemingly "gay" man would turn men off the video more than anything else^{vi}. In another setting, one man reacted strongly to one young student's statement that she learned that "not all men are bad". I left this in precisely to confront a misconception of feminism as teaching that "all men are bad" as well as to show the reality of young women's fears about men as they grow into adulthood.

Beyond the director's cut

The video can continue to provoke debate about Women's Studies, feminist activism, representation, gender and the terms of women's and men's participation. It signals both the ways that masculinity is positioned in relation to violence while also leaving space for discussion of its other meanings. The video can also encourage students, activists, feminist scholars and others to clarify the kind of space that exists for masculinity within a Women's Studies class, what is asked of men enrolled in such a class, the way that patriarchy should be defined and theorised, and the extent to which the students are able to adequately combine a message of solidarity and sisterhood with one about the importance of recognising difference.

More thematically, it hints at debate about aspects of sexual politics such as pornography and reclaiming a positive meaning for the word "cunt", and the extent to which women are responsible for their bodies. Is pornography bad? When? When not? Were the students' posters empowering or derogatory? In another scene, while students are claiming an ethnic and feminine identity based on having "natural" hair, India Arie's background lyrics seem to repudiate this. The word "dreadlocks" appears in both the visual and musical texts at the same moment, showing different ideological layers for viewers to unpack.

The video also highlights the centrality given to theorising violence in the course (Clarke 1997). This emphasis can be assessed and other starting points defined. Some have critiqued the seamlessness with which themes of domestic violence, rape, pornography and sexual harassment are presented, arguing that there was not enough nuance. Also, the

video doesn't convey the kinds of debates that students encountered in their popular actions, over whether or not women can rape men and whether or not men experience domestic violence at the rates that women do. Some have argued that the video failed to highlight the importance of celebration, recovering women's history and critiquing androcentrism in knowledge as a central part of what Introduction to Women's Studies courses do. Still others wished for additional focus on students at the beginning of the course so that more about their views at the end could be understood.

These reactions to the issues and actions as well as the video techniques and content have provided a rich basis for my own reflections on teaching feminist theory and action. I have shown how the video raises questions for debate and discussion in both Women's Studies classes and in feminist and activist workshops. From T-shirts to chalk graffiti, it also exemplifies a myriad of ways that young people can participate in feminist activism. Together, the video and essay can be an accessible resource for both encouraging and interrogating contemporary feminist movement-building in academic feminism and in the Caribbean.

ENDNOTES

ⁱⁱ I would like to thank many people for their comments regarding the video, including the staff at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, tutors and students in the “Introduction to Women’s Studies: Theoretical Concepts and Sources of Knowledge” course, Svenn Miki Grant and Michelle Rowley. I would also like to thank Destra Garcia, Mungal Patessar, 3Canal, Lyndon Livingstone and Kees ‘Kes’ Diefenthaler for the use of their music in the soundtrack.

ⁱⁱ Text in the video was drawn from Roberta Clarke (1997), Audre Lorde (1984), Sheila Ruth (1990), the NGO ASPIRE (Advocates for Safe Parenthood: Improving Reproductive Equity) at www.ttaspire.org and from my own poetry (Hosein 2005).

ⁱⁱⁱ In order of appearance, the background soundtrack comprised excerpts from Destra Garcia’s “Independent Ladies” (Razorshop White Stripes refix), 3Canal’s “Blue opera”, Mungal Patasar’s “Tendonitis” (Razorshop remix), India Arie’s “I Am Not My Hair”, Gabrielle Hosein’s and Lyndon Livingstone’s “Never Let Nobody (Remix)” and Kes Vs Liquid People’s One day with Dragons (Razorshop Refix).

^{iv} Jeff Henry (2008, 70) writes that “the character of the Baby Doll that has survived the vicissitudes of time was played by a black skinned female who carried a blonde blue-eyed doll in her arms, challenging male spectators, ‘mind yuh baby’.”

^v Patricia Mohammed defines gender consciousness as, “the self-awareness and confidence of one’s rights and privileges as ‘female’ or ‘male’ in society as well as the limits or oppressiveness being male or female still imposes on the individual to realize their potential” (2003, 6).

^{vi} He was surprised to learn that the Indo-Trinidadian guy was attending one of the students’ consciousness-raising sessions with his female fiancée, and in fact only looked like what he (an Indo-Jamaican) assumed was “gay”.

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Issue 2 – 2008

Review of Rosie Stone's Memoir *No Stone Unturned: The Carl and Rosie Story*

Diana Thorburn

Abstract

No Stone Unturned: The Carl and Rosie Story (published by Ian Randle, 2007) is Rosie Stone's memoir of her husband Carl's death from AIDS, and her own experience of having caught the disease and living with it for many years.

I have mixed feelings about the Rosie Stone book. On the one hand, I welcome a memoir from one of our own. There are so few of our own stories out there. It is such a refreshing pleasure to read an authentic, well-written — despite the sometimes stilted dialogue — story about one of “us”, with all the colloquialisms and familiar places and rhythms. I also welcome this necessary contribution to the destigmatization of HIV/AIDS. But there were aspects of the book that made me uncomfortable, namely, what I perceived to be Rosie Stone's using this book to settle scores with the many people who she feels wronged herself and Carl after their diagnoses with HIV/AIDS, his death, and beyond.

Such a memoir is unusual for Jamaica and the English-speaking Caribbean, even more so because Stone gives an autobiographical first person account of “high profile” Jamaicans (her husband and herself) living with (and dying from) HIV/AIDS. To my knowledge, only Jamaica Kincaid’s riveting memoir, *My Brother* (Random House, 1998), that recounts her brother’s suffering and death from AIDS in Antigua, tells a similar story. There is also Patricia Powell’s fictional account *A Small Gathering of Bones* (Beacon Press, 2003) which is set in Jamaica and vividly portrays the homophobia, stigma and rejection associated with HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. Given the sparseness of the genre, I welcome *No Stone Unturned* as a contribution towards the demystification of HIV/AIDS and those who are living with it. It is widely acknowledged that the spread of HIV/AIDS is exacerbated by the ignorance and stigma that bedevil Caribbean societies with regard to matters of sexuality.

According to the publishers, the book sold an unprecedented (for Jamaica) 4,000 copies in the first six months. Clearly, this was a story that people were interested in. To be honest, I must myself admit, if a bit embarrassingly, to a prurient interest in the story of the life and death of Carl Stone himself, one of Jamaica’s most influential and famous — if not *the* most influential and famous — political analysts. His death from AIDS in 1993 continues, even 15 years later, to inspire a hushed, if awed, remark or two if any topic remotely related should come up. And there is a similarly voyeuristic curiosity to know his wife Rosie’s story — her having caught the disease, and living with it for more than 15 years, especially in Jamaica. What a tale there is to tell there. But this prurience comes from the very fact that the condition is so stigmatized, and we know so little about it; a book like this — indeed, this book — should go a far way in helping to erase that stigma that leads to such unhealthy inquisitiveness.

Rosie Stone gives a very detailed account of Carl’s getting sick, the various diagnoses of his illness before the final diagnosis of AIDS, the aftermath of the diagnosis — how she dealt with it, mainly by remaining extremely private about it, and relying on the support of a handful of close confidantes — and then her discovery of her own diagnosis with the disease. She even shares details of the European holiday when she is sure she actually contracted the disease. We get glimpses of Carl himself — his work, his motivations, his headspace as the end was near — which are fascinating and enlightening, given how little we know about Carl Stone, despite the compelling role he played in Jamaican politics. The last part of the book is about Rosie’s own search for medical treatment, with some very close calls, including, at one point, a T-cell count of one. Through it all we also learn about Rosie’s life story, interesting in and of itself, aside from the HIV/AIDS aspects, and even Carl’s story. Rosie’s own very courageous struggle with AIDS is chronicled too. Based on her telling, it is amazing that she is still alive — she has benefited from just-in-time medical advances, and, it seems, sheer luck.

One of the most interesting aspects of Rosie Stone’s story is the various responses of the people around her and Carl — spanning all aspects of the spectrum from loving compassion to scornful rejection and discrimination. But it is this aspect of the book that, while intriguing, left me uncomfortable. As I read, I couldn’t help feeling like I was party

to Rosie Stone getting even with those who she perceived wronged her and her family. Though she doesn't always give full names, and I personally did not know who she was talking about when she spoke, say, about the friend who let her down, or the dermatologist (Dr. Andrea) who let it be known that she knew about the family's travails with AIDS, it would not have been difficult for me to find out, given that she used first names and enough other details that, had I wanted to, I could easily have discovered, given Jamaica's two or less degrees of separation. She did name her own brother, the popular *Observer* columnist Mark Wignall, and former Prime Minister Edward Seaga as having committed grievous wrongs against her and Carl.

Though the writing was, in places, a bit stiff, this minor weakness is easily compensated for by the alacrity with which the story is told. Rosie Stone has told an engrossing story, there is no doubt about that, and the record sales of the book prove it. More importantly, Rosie Stone has opened the curtains on a topic and a disease which all Caribbean people need to understand and come to terms with, as a matter of urgency.



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